

## End of Saturday mail won't save Postal Service

The U.S. Postal Service, losing business at a rapid clip to e-mail, private delivery services and poor or slow service, and bleeding cash in the recession, now wants to drop Saturday mail delivery to shore up its budget.

The service lost \$3.8 billion last year and claims it can save \$3 billion or more by ending Saturday delivery effective Oct. 1. Post offices and sorting centers would remain open, and mail trucks would make regular runs; only door-to-door delivery would end.

Postmaster General Jack Potter has been pushing for to cut Saturday since last year, but Congress must approve any change in delivery by the government-controlled service. That may not be likely.

But why is the operation in so much trouble? Hasn't it always delivered the mail six days a week?

The answer to the second question is yes, but now its losses are mounting, and the service has run out of places to borrow to cover its deficit. It needs to cut costs, and soon. Cutting a day out of the delivery schedule, allowing a major reduction in the carrier force nationwide, may seem the easiest way to do that.

Experts say the postal budget is 80 percent labor, so any cuts have to come out of people. But postal unions are strong, influential in Washington, and they've negotiated some of the best contracts in the nation.

The average postal worker now reportedly makes \$75,000 a year, with the same pay rates in force in New York as in Oberlin. Average spending per employee is \$81,000 with generous benefits, reportedly about 30 percent more than private competitors.

It's unlikely that postal pay will be cut, and possibly unfair to current workers. However, the service could seek contracts similar to those in other industries which allow firms to hire new workers at more bearable rates.

The service would have lost \$7 billion last year had not Congress given it some breathing room on pensions. And pensions are a big issue. The service is the only government agency required to pay for its retirement benefits up front. Eliminating that rule would put the service in the black, at least for now. Ending Saturday mail would not.

Congress, faced with a potentially unpopular decision to eliminate a delivery day, might finally act on the pension issue. It has avoided doing anything for years, mostly because the money paid into this fund helps hold down the federal deficit — on paper. That is only an accounting issue, but in Washington, that means everything.

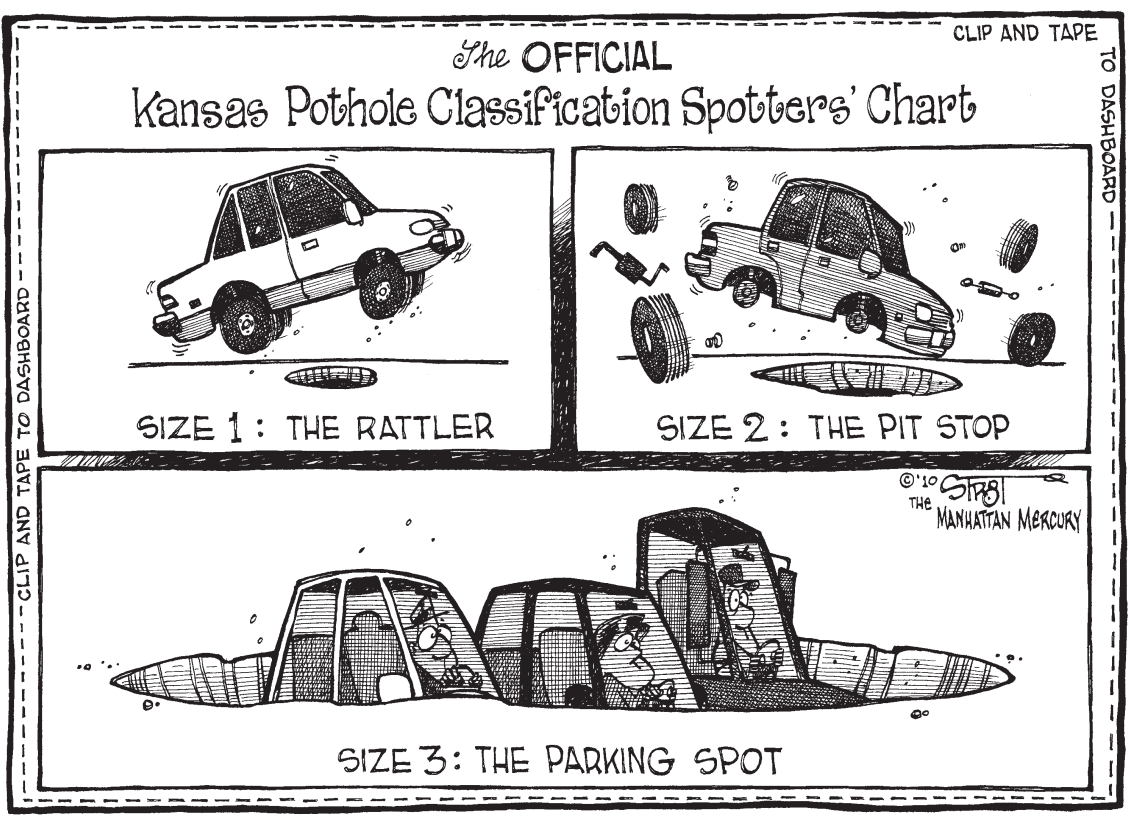
Another threat the service uses is to close more small-town post offices and lay off workers. Neither is popular.

Something has to give. Mr. Potter expects first-class mail volume to decline another 37 percent as more bills, letters, payments and documents shift to the Internet. Competitors are closing in on parcel business. The system could run out of cash.

Our view is that management and the unions need to get together, as has happened in autos and other industries, and rewrite their contracts. Congress should change the rules on pensions, because the mail is vital to our economy and our communities.

And we should keep Saturday delivery to maintain mail volume without scaring off even more business. Mailer groups, from newspapers to direct mail and catalog users, agree. They say the savings aren't enough, and the damage potential is great.

The Postal Service just cannot save itself by cutting. It must be free to compete, and that includes better union contracts and an end to unreasonable pension payments, not the end of Saturday mail. — Steve Haynes



## The song of spring has started

I picked up a new friend the other day.

He's sort of short and has a bad case of bumpy skin; but he's a really nice guy.

I call him Squeak. He's my first toad of spring.

Steve and I were out for a midnight walk last week. Sometimes that's the only time we can find to take the dog out and get both her and us some exercise.

It had rained, and as we passed under a streetlight, I noticed the grass beside the road moving. Since there was no wind, I bent over to take a look and there he was, hopping up on the curb.

I was wearing a light windbreaker, so I toad-napped him and tucked him in my pocket.

As we continued our walk, the toad, which was about the size of my fist, worked his way to the top of my pocket and squeaked at me.

He did this several times during the walk.

Each time I would gently push him back down into the pocket and he would squeak.

I've never heard a toad squeak before.

By the time we got home, Squeak



### Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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had started to croak his mating call like a regular toad. My guess is he has just emerged from hibernation and hadn't found his voice yet.

When we got to our yard, Steve put the dog away and I tenderly put Squeak down in a flower bed that has plenty of foliage. I'm hoping he will transfer himself to the garden, but right now that's a pretty bare space for a toad, since it's been tilled but mostly not replanted.

While Squeak was the first toad I've seen this spring, I know the frogs are out in force.

When we get a chance to walk in the park, we can hear them singing. It's the song of spring as far as I'm concerned.

But silence comes as soon as the dog goes down to the water for a drink and a dip — something she likes to do simultaneously.

You'd think a frog could tell the difference between a dog and a great blue heron, but I'm not complaining. A cautious frog is a safe frog, and a safe frog lives to sing another day. We hear their chorus start up as we leave the area.

Now I don't have to go to the park to hear the song of spring, though. Squeak serenades me.

On those nights when it is warm enough to have the window open, I can hear him calling other toads to come join him in the flower bed behind the yellow house. I sure hope that his friends hear and come calling.

Bird calls are all right in the morning, but at night, you can't beat the call of a herd of toads to signal that spring has come.

## Early years are learning years

To the Editor:

The week of April 11-17 was the "Week of the Young Child," set aside to recognize the importance of the early learning years.

Child development professionals have identified the first five years as a time of explosive growth, mental, emotionally and physically. The early environment children experience can help them reach their full potential.

This year's theme is "Early Years are Learning Years." As a child's first teacher, its parents play a huge role in preparing their child for a lifetime of learning.

For a child to flourish and learn, it must feel secure. Parents provide security by meeting not

### Letter to the Editor

only the physical needs of their child but by providing a nurturing environment where he or she feel safe to express their emotions, explore their world and mature at their own rate. Children need the security of knowing that their feelings are recognized and valued, their autonomy is encouraged and they can explore within a safe environment.

Parenting is the most important job any of us will ever have, and yet there is little to no training which prepares us to navigate these challenging years. In days past, young parents had extended family

to learn from. In today's society, families are more spread out and healthy families are harder to find.

Providing a nurturing environment is more than just common sense. It takes concentrated effort to ensure that a child grows up to be an emotionally healthy and productive adult.

For information, contact Smart Start Northwest Kansas at (785) 465-9103.

Karen Merryman, Colby Professional Development Coordinator  
Smart Start Northwest Kansas

### Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by e-mail

to oberlinherald@nwkans.com.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

It's time to put up or shut up. I've been making so much noise about getting something planted that Jim has called my bluff.

Over the weekend, he announced, "The garden is spaded up. When are you going to plant something in it?"

Now, the onus is on me to make something happen. Like tomatoes or beans or peas. I was thinking more along the lines of pansies or petunias, but something edible would be good, too.

— ob —

Listening to the news, it sounds like the debate over corporal punishment in schools is heating up again. Some principal has initiated the use of a wooden paddle for juvenile miscreants at his school, and parents are up in arms.

I'm not sure I would trust someone else to spank my child, but I certainly had no problem doing it myself. Perhaps if more parents took discipline into their own hands, there wouldn't be a need for the school to implement these drastic measures.

## Nine out of 10 is still pretty good

To the Editor:

### Top Ten List No. 2

Where else but in Decatur County or Oberlin can you find:

1. Cows lying on the shoulder of the road at night behind AN electric fence that startle the "heebee jeebies" out of you?
2. A friendly and competent waitress at a local eating joint?
3. A street that turns into a raging river when it rains and is ideal for cleaning the underneath of your car?

4. A can of pop for 50 cents at the Courthouse?

5. A new senior center, state-of-the-art movie theater and recreation center combination?

6. The best and most helpful county bus driver?

7. A better or more helpful museum than the Last Indian Raid Museum?

8. Gas prices that compete for the

highest in the state?

9. A place to park at the corner gas station while the daily Mensa meeting is in progress?

10. A vet who spends his Thanksgiving cleaning dried foam out of the paws of your favorite dog?

Well, nine out of 10 is still pretty good! What else can you add?

Jim Wesch, Oberlin

### Letters to the Editor

## Do you have unclaimed property?

To the editor:

It is a special honor for me to serve as your state treasurer, and one of my favorite parts of this job is the opportunity to visit communities across the state, meeting so many great people along the way.

I enjoyed the opportunity to visit Oberlin on April 6. Thanks to County Treasurer Jean Hale and Connie Grafel at the Chamber of Commerce for providing us with a great location as we returned property to the people who showed up to check in their names or the names

of family members.

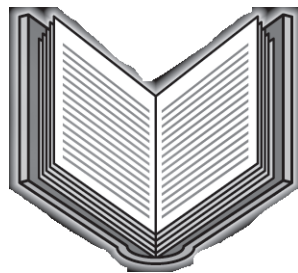
For those who were unable to attend our unclaimed property return, you can still check to see if you have unclaimed property by visiting our website at kansascash.com or calling our toll-free unclaimed property line at (800) 432-0386.

Today, 921 unclaimed properties valued at over \$70,876 in Decatur County alone are being held by the treasurer's office, so I would encourage everyone to take a couple of minutes to see if any of that property belongs to you or someone

you know.

Ad Astra Per Aspera.

Dennis McKinney, Topeka state treasurer



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