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America's postal trauma

Not the least significant aspect of the Postal Service Board of Governors' approval of a 15-cent stamp for first-class mail is the probability that it may be one of the last such momentous decisions by that particular body.

In bowing to fiscal inevitability and accepting the recommended higher postage rates, the board has added incentive for postal service reorganization which, as presently drafted, would include its own abolition.

The House has already overwhelmingly — 364 to 11 — passed a reorganization bill and the Senate begins hearings in June on its version of legislation originally submitted by the administration in fulfillment of a Carter campaign pledge.

What it all adds up to is reversing gears on a noble effort at public services reform that began almost a decade ago.

The idea then, as embodied in the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970, was to take the system out of politics, convert it into a government-owned corporation and operate it along the lines of a private business in the expectation that eventually it would break even, freeing the Treasury of the burden of massive annual subsidies.

It hasn't worked. So now the idea is to return the service to the political fold, abolish the Board of Governors, make the postmaster general once more a presidential appointee and return to the policy of subsidies as usual.

In fairness, it must be noted that the semi-independent service has made a determined effort to adapt the mails to the needs and conditions of the times. It has shut down inefficient facilities and cancelled unproductive services, experimented with advanced technology (sometimes with temporarily disastrous consequences, as in the case of the package-mangling automatic sorters), introduced new categories of service such as express mail and attempted — less successfully — to deal with its manpower dilemma. Its staff is both overmanned and in some areas overworked.

But the built-in problems of the mail system are of a scope to deny even determined effort at solution, or at least in the brief span of eight years.

The mails are one of the most enormous operations, public or private, of the entire economy. The annual budget is some $17 billion, 1 percent of the total gross national product, and 85 percent of this goes into the payroll for some 700,000 employees.

Their pay scale, according to a recent study by the American Enterprise Institute, a private Washington-based research organization, is about one-third above that of prevailing wage rates for similar work in private industry. The strength of the postal unions and their continuing clout in Congress despite the technical depoliticizing of the service have made reforms in this area at best a very long-term prospect.

A semi-independent service has not been able to lick the problems and it is not expected that returning the system to political control will do so.

What is expected from the upcoming reform of the previous reform is greater flexibility and less public trauma in dealing with the problems.

By dropping the never-realized break-even policy, swiftly recurrent rate increases — from 6 to 15 cents for a first-class letter in four jumps during the eight years of the service's existence — should be avoided.

But that does not mean the steadily increasing cost of seeing that the mails continue to go through will be contained, or will no longer come out of the public's pockets. Congress and the Treasury will be back in the subsidy business full time, at likely considerably more than the present level of some $900 million a year

The more things change, etc.



AS TIME GOES BY

Assessments rise

FORTY YEARS AGO
—1938—

County Clerk - Assessor Leo Chandler said personal property tax assessments in the North Branch area had increased $8,000. The Kimball area reported eight days of consecutive rainfall for the first time since 1900. Nebraska City grain dealers said the area's wheat harvest would begin at least a week earlier than normal...A number of fuses on rural lines were blown out by an electrical storm in the Syracuse area.

TWENTY FIVE YEARS AGO
—1953—

The Otoe County Board of Equalization voted 3-2 to assess town and city real estate at the 1952 level. Commissioners Earl Deming, Robert Wilson and Harold Lamb voted "yes." County Clerk Lucian Smith and Assessor Wilson Erwin voted "no". Clarence Vigen was elected president of Nebraska City Centennial, Inc. William C. McMillen, superintendent of the School for the Blind for six years, resigned...The Eugene Pratt home at Syracuse was struck by lightning.

TEN YEARS AGO
—1968—

Mrs Tad Hammond, superintendent of St. Mary's Episcopal Church reported 30 registered for the vacation church school at the church...By the fact of alphabetical order, B.A Johnson, Syracuse, beat son, Jim, in graduating from Peru State as both received bachelor of arts in education degrees...David Schneider, son of Mr and Mrs Charles Schneider, was awarded a certificate of merit award by the Dean Weinberg Youthsurance Scholarship competition. The Rev Michael E Volkmer of Nebraska City planned to be ordained to the priesthood in the Chapel of the Assumption at St. Charles Seminary at Carthagena, Ohio.

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The Prayer For Today From The Upper Room

I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. (Hebrews 8:10 RSV)

PRAYER: O God, we open heart, mind, and spirit to Your transforming power. Help us, in love, to serve You in Your kingdom. In Jesus' spirit. Amen.

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Ivan D.E. Beaumont — THE BUCK ENDS HERE

Meter plant celebrates

Thank you —

...to Mike Churchill of the City Street Department for "getting involved" and reporting what later developed to be a break-in and attempted robbery at the News-Press.

It's good there are people who want to help. We believe that as a result of Mike notifying the police at that early hour, the thieves didn't get a chance to finish the job.

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Congratulations —

...to American Meter Company on its 25th anniversary celebration which will be held Thursday and Friday of this week.

A special section on the anniversary appears with the Sunday News-Press. Nebraska City people got behind the effort to help build American Meter and the company wants to say thanks to everyone with its open house.

Norm Bruening, plant manager, has been working for several months with others on his staff to organize the reception and open house. It promises to be a big event.

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New neighbors —

Our new neighbors on South Eighth Street will be the staff of the Blue Valley Mental Health Clinic. They take over the former Nebraska City Medical Clinic.

Dr Rod Koerber will close his practice here at the end of the month and move to Omaha where he will do cancer research. We regret losing the doctor, his wife, Gay, and their children, but we wish them much success.

Nebraska City has "lost" two doctors in the past year or so. It may well be time to get something going to attract other doctors to town. In addition, Dr Richard Johnson, a dentist, is moving to Lincoln, but says he will maintain an office in Nebraska City several days a week.

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The other day Mrs Earl Andrews stepped into the News-Press office with flowers. No, not just any flowers but ones she had produced from a plant — orchids.

You oughta heard the people here as they walked past the woman with the orchids. .ah. .oh. oh.

Mrs Andrews, you made our day

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The flashing light —

Police Chief Joe Lange says he has a problem with people not observing the flashing red light at the fire-rescue complex

The light is "on" only when emergency vehicles are moving from the complex. Chief Lange explained that the flashing red light means drivers must stop, but may proceed with caution.

Police will issue tickets to violators.

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The chiropractor —

I can't read Japanese so I can't tell you where Dr M.B. De Jarnette is just now, but the card did say that he was staying at the Hotel Okura which surely must be Tokyo.

He writes that 1,000 doctors are attending the sessions. He is enjoying the trip, but "it's a long way from home."

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Going to school —

Jim Widhelm will be leaving Nebraska City soon for Davenport, Ia., where he will enroll in the Chiropractic School. Jim has been parks and recreation director in Nebraska City for four years.

Congratulations to Jim for making what we are sure will be a decision he will treasure. We have met a lot of chiropractors at sessions with Dr De Jarnette and they are a dedicated group of professionals.

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The graduates —

Bill Golden and his class of 1938 are among the honor classes this year at the NCHS alumni banquet which was held Saturday night at the Memorial Building.

Especially pleasing to the Goldens is the honor the family has by having their five children, all NCHS graduates, attend the same banquet

They are Mrs Faye Cooper, 1964, Northside teacher; Mrs Eugene (Nancy) Wurtele, 1967, NCHS art instructor, Bob, 1968, Mrs Rich (Jean) Hollmann, 1972, and John, 1976. All live in Nebraska City

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The long weekend —

It promises to be a long weekend. There are reunions for NCHS and St Bernard's Academy (NC Lourdes), and the annual Memorial Day program will be held Monday at 9 a m , at Wyuka Cemetery The Memorial Day program will be conducted by the veterans organizations.



Martha Angle and Robert Walters — IN WASHINGTON

GAO: investigate thyself

WASHINGTON—(NEA)— No federal agency surpasses the General Accounting Office in its dedication to ferreting out waste, mismanagement and inefficiency in government. But the GAO ought to heed the biblical injunction: "Physician, heal thyself."

Widely acclaimed as the "watchdog" of the bureaucracy, the GAO is the investigative arm of Congress with an annual budget of $176 million and the wide-reaching authority to audit and investigate virtually every government program.

It produces about 1,000 reports every year, on subjects ranging from "the federal government's bill payment performance is good but should be better" to "the Secretary of Defense is becoming too involved in the day-to-day management process."

Every major federal department and agency has been criticized by GAO, for spending money too fast or too slow, for having too few or too many employees and for every other imaginable managerial inadequacy.

No area of government endeavor is too obscure to escape GAO's attention — including Guam's inadequate budgeting and accounting system, overpriced contracts for elevator maintenance at Veterans Administration hospitals and poor planning within the District of Columbia school system.

The results of almost all the work of GAO's 5,200 employees — including 3,100 auditors, investigators and other professionals — are presented to Congress, the press and the public in the form of blue-covered reports.

But those documents are distributed under a slipshod, inefficient and archaic system. The result is that much of GAO's valuable work in clogged in a bottleneck of massive proportions.

"The system is inefficient and I know it," admits Cynthia A. Schwartz, acting manager of GAO's distribution branch, which is supposed to respond to 96,000 requests each year for copies of 480,000 GAO reports.

To handle the requests that come pouring in by mail, telephone and from people who personally visit the agency's headquarters here, GAO employs exactly three permanent clerks.

Although agency officials have limited the number of permanent employees, Ms. Schwartz is allowed to hire temporary workers for six months. Their term of service can be extended for an additional six months, but after a year they must be dismissed.

So GAO has a constantly rotating group of 25 temporary workers who know they'll be laid off not long after they learn their jobs. Many of them actively seek permanent employment elsewhere during the six-month extension and quit in the middle of that period rather than wait around for the honor of being fired after a year.

Ms. Schwartz places much of the blame on the Civil Service Commission, which allows her to pay only $7,000 a year to those working in the distribution office.

Automated equipment soon to be installed ought to reduce the processing time.

When she assumed the post of acting distribution manager a year ago, Mrs. Schwartz explains with smile, there was a delay of 60-to-90 days in filling requests for reports. But that now has been reduced to a mere 30 to 45 days.

The prospects for further improvement are bleak, however. When GAO recently submitted its budget request to Congress for the 1979 fiscal year, it sought no additional employees to handle management tasks such as report distribution.

The situation demands an investigation by an independent government "watchdog" agency that could provide a tough critique of an office held together by little more than chewing gum and bailing wire. But only one federal agency performs that function — and it isn't especially interested.

SAFETY VALVE

"...a wet year..."

EDITOR, News-Press. Farmers are complaining that this is a very wet year I remember 1915 was very wet. It started raining early in the spring and kept it up into August.

In those days all wheat and oats were cut with a grain binder which was pulled by mules or horses and the operation of the machine was performed by the turning of a large wheel underneath the tying mechanism.

The wheel also carried the weight of the binder It was called a bull wheel.

The fields were so wet that year that the farmers used wooden beer kegs through which they put an axle and fastened these under the binders so when the binder started to settle into the ground it would ride on these kegs.

We had a Cushman gasoline motor which was built on an extra frame on the binder and the machine was run by this motor. That year we used six head of mules to pull our binder Four were hitched up abreast and two were put in front. We had to have a rider on one up front and that was my job. After a day of riding I usually ate my supper standing.

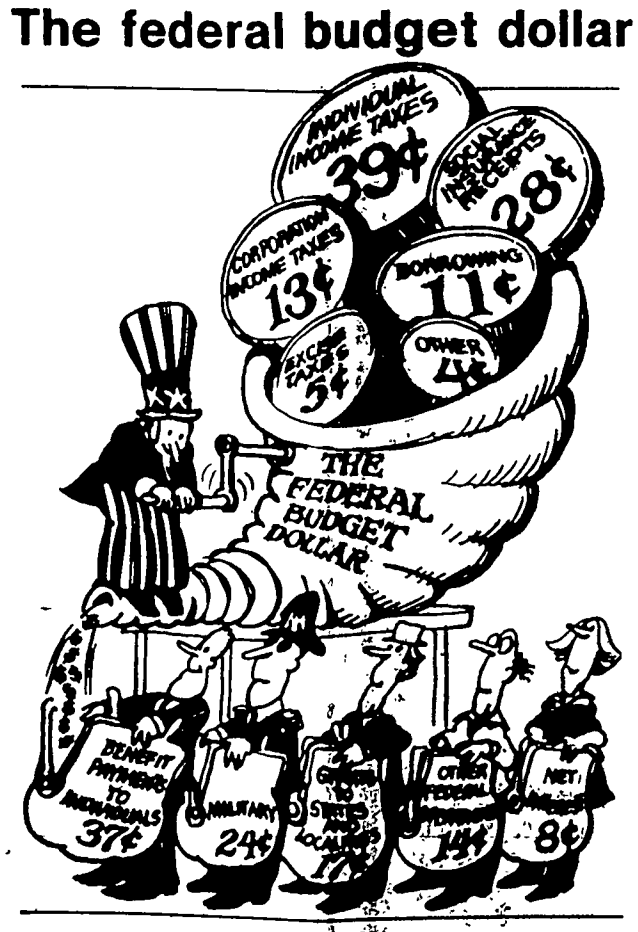
That year we stacked all our bundles of grain and in late fall the grain was threshed and it was in good condition.

My friend, Lew Hunt, remembers that year very well. He lived in Iowa around Bedford I believe close to the Grand River. He said they moved to Missouri that year and they had four horses hitched to a high wheel wagon and sometimes the wagons were axle deep in mud.

He also remembers riding one of the lead horses when they cut their grain. And I can't recall ever having a complete crop loss in a wet year but we practically did in 1934.

BOB KREIFELS

The federal budget dollar



WHERE DOES UNCLE SAM'S money come from? And where does it go? These figures are based on President Carter's proposed budget for fiscal 1979, adjusted to reflect his recent decision to delay a tax cut from Oct. 1 to Dec. 1.

Today In History

By The Associated Press

Today is Sunday, May 28, the 148th day of 1978. There are 217 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history.

On this date in 1940, in World War II, British and French troops began an evacuation from Dunkirk, France.

On this date:

In 1863, the first Black regiment from the North in the Civil War left Boston for the front under Colonel Robert Shaw.

In 1864, Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria-Hungary landed in Vera Cruz, Mexico to become emperor.

In 1934, a Canadian woman, Oliva Dionne, gave birth to quintuplets in a farmhouse near Callender, Ontario.

In 1940, King Leopold the Third of Belgium surrendered his army to German invaders in World War Two.

Today's birthdays: Retired President Warren Giles of baseball's National League is 82 years old. Biologist Barry Commoner is 61

Thought for today: Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers — Lord Alfred Tennyson, English poet, 1809-1892.



HEALTH — Lawrence E. Lamb, M.D.

'Rapid' isn't 'right'

Lawrence Lamb, M.D.

DEAR DR. LAMB — I want to lose weight — about 19 pounds — but I want to do it right and as fast as possible. I'm a female, age 14 and 5-feet-4. My weight is about 134 with clothes on. I think 117 to 115 is good for me What do you think?

I have a medium bone structure and do moderate exercise. Sometimes more or less, it depends on what I do for that day. My biggest problem is my legs, hips and rear. Also a little on the upper part of my arms. Could you send me some information on losing weight and some exercises I could do to help me lose weight in the spots I mentioned?

DEAR READER — The only way to determine the proper weight for anyone is to measure the fat under the skin. If you have a skin fold around the middle that is over a half inch in thickness you probably could lose some fat. Women normally carry a bit more fat than men. Tables for height and age are fine, but in the last analysis it is not how many pounds you weigh but how much fat is under the skin that counts.

And I'm not wild about your desire to lose the weight rapidly. It goes on slowly in most cases and comes off slower. If you want to do it right you should not try to lose much more than a pound a week. I am sending you The Health Letter number 4-7, Weight Losing Diet, that includes a diet plan you can follow It also recommends that you exercise.

Others who want this issue can send 50 cents with a long, stamped, self-addressed envelope for it to me in care of this newspaper, P.O. Box 1551, Radio City Station, New York, NY 10019.

Walking is one of the best exercises you can use while trying to lose weight because people can do it for long periods of time and it doesn't overstress the body. The exercise will help protect you from losing important body muscle while on a diet

For the best effect from exercise I like to see a person develop a well-balanced program of simple exercises that use all the muscles. For a young girl like yourself swimming, tennis and various sports are also useful

There are no specific exercises that will cause spot reducing You lose weight in a spot — such as legs, or abdomen — by losing fat all over The walking, however, will help to firm your muscles as you lose the fat. If you like you can go on to jogging or running when you have demonstrated you have enough endurance to walk an hour without undue fatigue and soreness.

DEAR DR. LAMB — In general does breast feeding on demand cause fat adults? Also is formula or breast feeding better to avoid fatty tissue formation?

DEAR READER — The general opinion is that a breast-fed baby is less likely to be a fat baby. The correlation between a moderately or slightly fat baby and adult obesity is rather shaky though. It is true that excessively fat babies are more likely to be fat adults.

The habit of switching babies to solid food early and adding foods to the milk intake — from the bottle or from the breast — provides an opportunity to add far too many calories This may be an important factor in causing fat babies and possibly inducing adult obesity.

It now appears that mother's milk may offer other advantages over formula milk — one of the important ones being the transferred immunity protection for the tiny baby against a variety of infectious diseases As an early proponent expressed it, cow's milk is for calves and women's milk is for babies.

Berry's World



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"One of the BEST things about out-of-town newspapers is you don't even THINK of looking at the obit columns!"