

## Mail service costs are not the problem

by Fredric Rolando,  
president of the National  
Association of Letter Carriers

A recent notice asking mail subscribers whether their newspaper arrived late suggests that your readers, like many in rural areas and small towns around the country, are feeling the impact of mail delays.

That's the inevitable result when processing plants are consolidated and mail has to travel farther to be sorted.

Some context may be useful -- because the push to consolidate mail centers is only part of a broader attempt to degrade the quality mail service on which folks in Loyal, Greenwood, Spencer and Granton -- and elsewhere long have relied. Some in Washington also want to end Saturday mail delivery, which would prevent your small businesses from receiving weekend checks and orders, and end door-to-door delivery, compelling residents (in Wisconsin's weather, no less) to traipse around neighborhoods daily in search of cluster boxes.

The proposed cuts in service are based largely on the following premise: Growing Internet usage to pay bills or send greetings causes the Postal Service to lose billions of dollars a year; taxpayers are on the hook, so services must be degraded.

That premise, however, is demonstrably false.

For starters, postal operations are profitable, and increasingly so. The Postal Service reported \$1.4 billion in operating profits in Fiscal Year 2014, a figure already surpassed halfway through 2015.

After dropping during the worst recession in 80 years, mail revenue is stabilizing amid an improving economy. Meanwhile, as folks in Unity and

elsewhere shop online, skyrocketing package revenue makes the Internet a net positive -- auguring well for the future. (Postal operations are financed by earned revenue, not by taxpayers.)

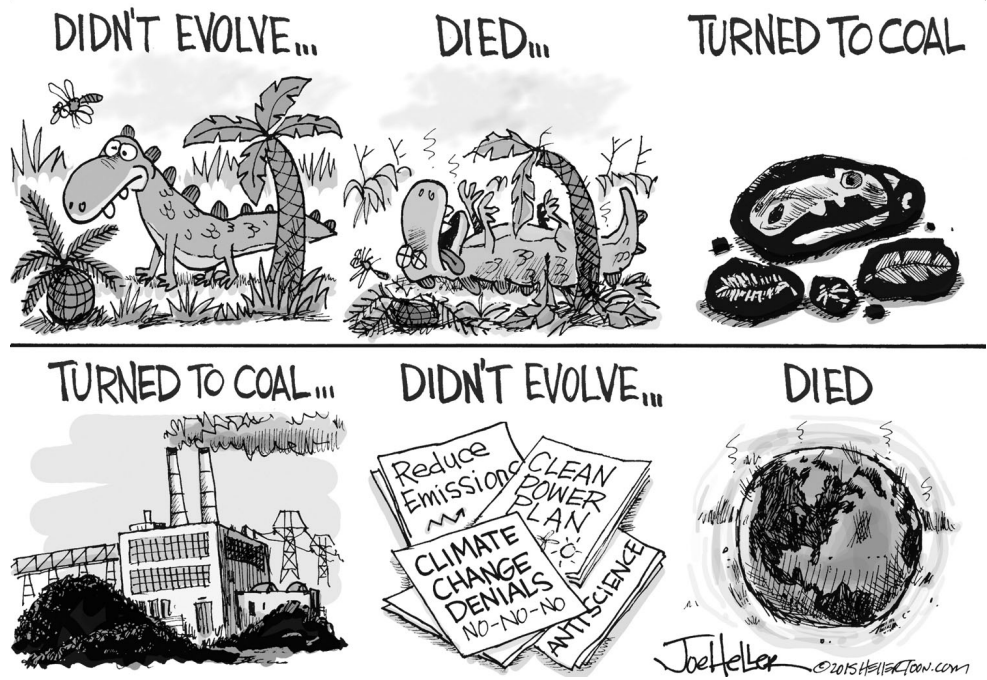
There is red ink at the Postal Service, but it's unrelated to the mail or the Internet. In 2006, a lame-duck Congress mandated that the Postal Service prefund future retiree health benefits. No other agency or company has to prefund for even one year; the Postal Service must prefund 75 years into the future and pay for it all over a decade. That \$5.6 billion annual charge is the red ink.

Yet, some in Washington hope to use this artificial financial "crisis" to dismantle a popular public agency (enjoying 80-plus percent approval), even turn its duties over to private corporations.

To do so, they need to convince you that services you rely on are the problem -- hence, that your mail must be slowed, your delivery days reduced, your door service ended.

But degrading postal networks that have returned to profitability is illogical. It would needlessly hurt residents and business owners. It would drive mail away, damaging the Postal Service's bottom line. It would ignore the actual problem -- the prefunding mandate. And it would cost Wisconsin jobs. The national mailing industry, dependent on a robust, six-days-a-week Postal Service, employs 7.5 million Americans in the private sector -- including 180,238 Wisconsinites.

Wisconsinites should urge their congressional representatives to preserve the postal networks while addressing the prefunding fiasco. Then the Postal Service, based in the Constitution and the largest employer of veterans, can continue to offer Americans the world's most affordable delivery network.



## Businesses deny youth tobacco usage

The Wisconsin Wins (WI Wins) program is a state-level initiative designed to decrease youth access to tobacco products. Since the campaign's launch in the spring of 2002, tobacco compliance checks have been conducted annually in each of Wisconsin's 72 counties. The Clark County Health Department would like to recognize the following retailers for passing a tobacco compliance check in 2015:

- Abbotsford: Abarrotes La China; Abbotsford Travel Stop BP; Holiday Gas Station; La Tropicana
- Curtiss: Abbyland Truck Stop
- Dorchester: Cenex C-Store
- Greenwood: Family Dollar; Kwik Trip
- Loyal: Kwik Trip; Loyal BP
- Neillsville: Cenex C-Store; Drescher

BP Oil; Kwik Trip; Hansen's IGA; Family Dollar

- Owen: Creekside Convenience; O-W Sports & Liquor Store
- Thorp: Specialty Smoke Shoppe
- Withee: Mobil Mart

At each of these locations, a minor (youth under 18) attempted to purchase a pack of cigarettes and was unsuccessful. Employees refusing to complete these sales exhibited both job competence and regard for the law. Thank you for doing your part to keep Clark County's youth tobacco-free and healthy.

For more information about the Clark County Health Department, visit us at <http://www.co.clark.wi.us/healthdepartment> or call 715.743.5105

For a complete list of past WI Wins inspection checks by county, visit <http://wiwins.org/>.

## GOP is firmly in control of state politics

Republicans seem ready to consolidate their control of state government in Wisconsin with both legislative and judicial moves.

Conservatives now control much of the government. Gov. Scott Walker is a Republican who wants to be the next president of the United States. Republicans have large majorities in both houses of the Legislature, thanks in part to GOP gerrymandering of district lines in 2011. Election laws have been changed. Voting hours have been reduced. Photo IDs will be required to vote -- moves that seemed aimed at the poor and elderly.

The State Supreme Court, where conservatives hold a majority, recently halted a John Doe investigation and opened the campaign door to consulting and collaboration among all groups supporting candidates in a state election.

One could argue that it already amounts to an iron grip on government. But Republicans and conservatives are not done. Among the ideas being floated in the State Capitol are:

-- Changing the composition of the Government Accountability Board which oversees elections, lobbying and ethics. Currently, the board consists of six retired judges appointed by the governor and confirmed by the State Senate. The board appoints its staff. The push for change may range from returning to a system in which the politicians control the issues and regulations to requiring Senate approval of the GAB director selected by the board.

-- Removing legislators from the board of the scandal-plagued Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). One plan would replace the four legislative members with two more

appointees by the governor and two other citizen members appointed by the Republican legislative leaders.

The two Democratic legislators on WEDC have struggled for a public airing of a very critical report by the Legislative Audit Bureau of the agency's distribution of funds. There even is talk about replacing the audit bureau with inspectors within government agencies.

Walker initially served as chairman of the WEDC, an agency which he proposed and touted as boosting job creation in Wisconsin. The governor's latest budget bill called for removing himself and legislators from the board and merging WEDC with the state's low-income housing agency.

The Legislature rejected the agency merger idea but kept lawmakers (two from each party) on the board. It did accept Walker's idea of removing himself from the board.

Clearly, Walker leaving the board may be an effort to reduce the potential political damage in his efforts to become the Republican presidential nominee. The national media may focus on WEDC woes if Walker surges to the front of the GOP presidential pack.

Conservatives seem to have retreated from drastically changing the state's open-records law, but information has surfaced that the governor's office was playing a significant role in the move. Reporters have asked for and are still awaiting details on the role of Walker's office.



Matt Pommer

Lingering in the background is whether the State Supreme Court would limit what information held by the governor's office is made available to the public.

The high court now is being asked to give Walker and the Legislature the power to write administrative rules for elementary and secondary education. The rules could become important tools as voucher and charter schools expand. The state superintendent of public instruction, elected statewide, now writes the rules.

An appeals court has ruled that a Republican-written law to give the power to the governor was unconstitutional. Walker's friends on the Supreme Court might see it differently.

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