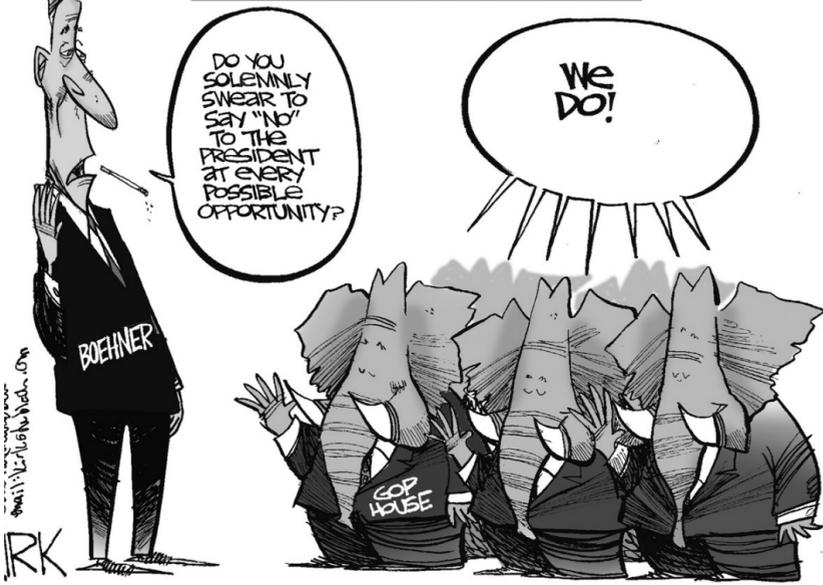


Mailing Address: P.O. Drawer 1200, Seminole, TX 79360 • Email: news@seminolesentinel.com • Web Site: www.seminolesentinel.com • Phone: (432) 758-3667 • Fax: (432) 758-2136

The OTHER SWEARING-IN...



Paper 'n Ink... the price of postage...

By Lynn Brisendine
It's truly a love-hate relationship. We depend upon a quasi-government agency for a lot of important details in our lives. And even though they do their jobs pretty well for not much money, really when compared to any private sector business, they still draw our ire, easily and often.
The United States Postal Service once again raised their price of first class mail by a penny this past Monday.

- Letters (1oz.) -- 1-cent increase to 46 cents
- Letters additional ounces -- unchanged at 20 cents
- Letters to all international destinations -- \$1.10
- Postcards -- 1-cent increase to 33 cents

payments continue? They are using these funds to counter the debt they continue to run up with little regard for actual fiscal responsibility. In other words, these monies are being used to make the Congress look not quite as bad as reality demands.
The Postal Officials threw a monkey wrench in these works last year by defaulting, for the first time, on these mandated payments.
Thousands of people work for the Post Office and the operation is a giant enterprise that handles billions of pieces of mail in many categories. Some voices have been heard that privatizing this operation, making it a for profit venture, is the way to go.

A lot of newsprint has been used over the last few years to tell us that this once venerated agency is suffering duress and taking huge monetary losses on a daily basis. To such an extent that too many upper echelon people in the USPS are considering changes that will take away services depended upon for over 225 years.
An article in Esquire, found on Zite, ponders, not the reasons for the possible lost services, but if the American public really wishes this one-time staple agency to change so radically; questions abound.

Others are just as quick to say it will not work. As an example of why it wouldn't be what we have come to depend on is that a first class letter, now a whopping 46 cents is delivered anywhere the address calls for no matter distance or difficulty in making that delivery. A letter to some locations in Alaska many miles from any post office is 46 cents. It is estimated that a private service would charge upwards of \$50 to drop that letter in the receptacle way out in the woods.

The reasons for these losses are well documented and much of their troubles can be blamed on the rising connectivity and a switch to a paperless business reality.

The newspaper industry has been vocal in its opposition to cutting Saturday service. And for many community papers, Saturdays remain a major mailing day. Others, too, have balked at cutting the service by one day. It appears that Postal officials are darned if they do, and irresponsible if they don't.

The internet is swamping what many term as "snail mail." Emails and social media sites among relatives and friends have seen the demise of personal correspondence. Bill paying, too, has become an easy process using electronic transfers from bank accounts straight to the companies owed.

It's a brave new world which continues to re-make itself ever faster. The Post Office is just one area of our lives being shaken. The real question isn't about whether we could live without the post office.

These two areas of private and business life alone mean billions of lost revenue to an organization which made its primary living delivering these personal items daily.

It's about whether we'd want to. The article in Esquire finished with a list of important dates connected to our Post Office..

But wait a sec... is the Post Office really being hurt that badly from new habits? The answer is yes, and not so much. Several other factors are in play causing economic woes for the USPS.

Great Moments in Postal History
1775: Benjamin Franklin is appointed the first postmaster general.

A lot of what is wrong with the budget process of this mega agency comes from another organization which continues to see its ratings drop like a stone in a well, the United States Congress.

1811: Fast-moving steamboats replace rafts and rowboats for mail transportation.

The article explains: "In mid-November, the postmaster general, Patrick Donahoe, reported that the post office had lost \$15.9 billion for the year and was operating on just a few days' cash flow, having reached its legal debt limit. He all but begged Congress to take action. Mail was down 5 percent from the year before, and wages and benefits and other worker-related costs were an unsustainable 80 percent of the postal service's \$81 billion operating expenses."

1833: Abraham Lincoln is appointed postmaster of New Salem, Illinois, at the age of twenty-four.

"But nobody wants to hear that more than 70 percent of those losses were for extraordinary budget obligations mandated by Congress, or that the postal service posted its thirteenth-straight quarter of productivity gains."

1847: The first U.S. postage stamps are issued, featuring Ben Franklin on the five-cent stamp and George Washington on the ten-cent stamp.

Congress continues to demand from the Post Office an annual payment of several billions to cover expected retirement costs of postal workers. That sounds like good fiscal planning, except for the fact that the fund in question sees an average of cash actually needed. In other words, it is fully funded at this time for several years to come and these additional dollars are unnecessary.

1860: The Pony Express is contracted as a mail carrier until the transcontinental telegraph line is finished.

So, why is our Congress demanding these

1933: President Roosevelt's New Deal sponsors the placement of more than a thousand public murals and sculptures in post offices to boost morale during the Great Depression.

1957: First semiautomatic sorting machine installed in Silver Spring, Maryland, doubling the sorting capabilities of clerks.

1958: Harry Winston sends the Hope Diamond to the Smithsonian Institution via first-class mail from New York City to Washington, D.C., for \$2.44.

1963: ZIP codes introduced.

1970: President Nixon changes the postal service from government Cabinet department to independent federal agency.

2006: The last year the postal service turned a profit — \$900 million.

State Capital Highlights

Compiled by Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association



Senate panel holds first hearing on budget...

AUSTIN — A state budget gradually will be attached to the framework provided by SB 1, the general appropriations bill authored by Tommy Williams, R-The Woodlands, chair of the Senate Finance Committee.

In a hearing spread over three days last week, the Senate Finance Committee absorbed invited testimony given by officials representing institutions of higher education, the state comptroller's office, the Legislative Budget Board, the Teachers Retirement System and more.

John Heleman, chief revenue estimator with the comptroller's office, said collections from tax and non-tax revenue sources are expected to total some \$96.2 billion, minus \$3.6 billion that will go into the so-called Rainy Day Fund.

The figure Heleman gave increases to \$101.4 billion available for general-purpose spending in 2014-2015, when a projected ending balance of \$8.8 billion from the current two-year budget cycle is added.

But this is only the beginning of a long process to deliver the Legislature's most basic obligation: the budget.

Bill would reform testing

Rep. Mike Villarreal, D-San Antonio, on Jan. 23 filed legislation that would cut to four the number of assessments upon which students must achieve a cumulative passing score in order to graduate from high school. The current number of assessments that students must pass is 15.

The Seminole Sentinel welcomes and will publish engagement and wedding stories under a long time policy.

The Sentinel will accept and publish for free weddings which are newsworthy. We will provide our readers this service with the understanding that we reserve the right to edit the content for space. We will not accept (for free) a wedding story which details an event more than one month old. Should you wish to have a story published concerning an event more than a month old, we have an affordable and workable wedding package available.

HB 596 also would:

- Limit the number of school days spent on testing students;

- Cut the requirement that end-of-course tests count for 15 percent a student's final grade in the course; and

- End the practice of using test scores to calculate the "recognized" or "exemplary" rating of a campus.

Villarreal said his intent is to shift the state away from high-stakes testing in response to calls for education reform by parents, educators and business leaders.

Bills would curb texting

So far, at least five state lawmakers are offering legislation to make it illegal to read, write or send text messages while driving a motor vehicle in Texas.

HB 27 by Rep. Trey Martinez-Fischer, D-San Antonio, has an exception for a peace officer or an emergency responder if the text messaging is in connection with official duties.

HB 63 by Rep. Tom Craddick, R-Midland, includes exceptions for a citizens band radio or CB radio hybrid or a commercial two-way radio communication device and stipulates that it is a defense to prosecution if the driver was reading, selecting or entering a telephone number or name to make a phone call or to navigate using a global positioning service.

HB 69 by Rep. Eddie Lucio III, D-San Benito, is much like the others, and Lucio has signed as joint author of Craddick's bill.

HB 108 by Rep. Patricia Harless, R-Spring, would ban reading, writing or sending a text-based communication —

including instant messaging, e-mail and text messaging, unless the vehicle is stopped.

SB 28 by Sen. Judith Zafirini, D-Laredo, creates an exception allowed use of a handheld wireless communication device to report illegal activity or summon emergency help, and allows a political subdivision to adopt a local ordinance or rule that is more stringent than the various changes in the law she is proposing.

"Ensuring the safety of our loved ones is a paramount issue," Lucio said. "The texting and driving ban will prevent the fatal accidents too many families have experienced."

Abbott lauds EPA ruling
The U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit on Jan. 24 denied the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's petition for rehearing of the Court's August 2012 decision to vacate the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule.

The rule was meant to cause states to do a better job of containing toxic emissions originating mostly from power plants and drift into other states, negatively affecting air quality.

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott on Jan. 25 issued a statement welcoming the action, saying, "The court agrees that the EPA acted lawlessly and violated federal law in its zeal to inflict job-killing regulations on the state."

On Dec. 30, 2011, the D.C. Circuit Court issued an order stopping the enforcement of the cross-state air pollution rule and in August 2012 vacated the rule. The state of Texas, the National Mining Association and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers filed suit against the EPA, arguing that enforcement of the rule presented unfair financial burdens and would have forced the closure of older power plants.



Wright Words ...

By Dustin Wright
Sentinel Managing Editor

Being an avid Texas Tech University supporter, I always find some humor in a good ol' Aggie (Texas A&M) and/or Longhorn (Univ. of Texas) joke.

The latest one I heard was Monday evening, while reading through some Associated Press news articles while attempting to put my son to sleep.

It's a doozy. According to the AP, Rep. Ryan Guillen, a democrat from House District 31 in South Texas, filed a bill Monday that would require the Longhorns and Aggies to play each year.

The schools played annually since 1915 until last season, when the series ended when Texas A&M left Texas and the Big 12 for the SEC last season.

"This game is as much a Texas tradition as cowboy boots and barbecue," Guillen said in a statement provided to ESPN. "The purpose of this bill is to put the eyes of Texas upon our two greatest state universities to restore this sacred Texas tradition."

"I think the people of Texas want a game, and we're trying to get them one."

I am all for rivalry football. In fact, the TAMU/UT game is probably my favorite of rivalry games played on the college gridiron.

But, to have the Texas Legislature consider a law which would require the two teams to play one another annually on the football field instead of having the game scheduled mutually by both schools. I thought we had done away with

"arranged marriages" in today's western society.

Guillen, who is a TAMU graduate, really ought to step back from this filed bill and take a look at the real pressing issues facing our great state.

We have issues with public school financing which need to be addressed, as well as concerns with healthcare, prison systems, the Texas state budget, criminal laws, water and other more pressing problems than a rivalry football game.

Would I love to see Texas A&M and Texas battle it out year-in and year-out as they had done for so long.

Even further, I'd love to see TAMU back in conference play with Texas Tech, Baylor, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State and the rest of the Big 12 Conference, a conference which the school helped establish back in the mid-1990s.

It'd definitely make the words to the "Aggie War Hymn" sound right again, since the song is devoted to the school's "hatred" toward the University of Texas.

If Rep. Guillen is seeking publicity in filing this bill, he's going to receive it. However, it may become negative publicity. Publicity he will more than likely discourage in the end.

If our Legislators happen to see this bill through, it will be considered a "head in the hands" moment for me. A moment where I will further wonder "what the heck are we doing down in Austin at the Capital."

Those moments don't happen to often, but stand out like a sore thumb when they do.

I say we continue to let the schools continue their respective courses. One day, the great TAMU/UT rivalry will be reborn and fueled with the fire of past contests and years of separation.

In addition, I also say we remind our State Representatives and Senators that they have jobs to do, ensuring they help pave the way to ensure the Lone Star State remains a vibrant state in our Union, by focusing on laws and bills which will keep Texas moving forward for the benefit of all.

Letter to the Editor

P.O. Box 1200 Seminole, Texas 79360
Sign and include address and phone number...
You may also send your letter via the Internet.

Send it to
seminolesentinelonline.com

The Sentinel requests that letters be concise and reserves the right to edit for libelous content or inappropriate language and space. We will edit a letter to conform with the standards we use in publishing a responsible community newspaper.