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photo by Brian Wilson

Cleaning up

A worker uses a pressure washer to remove the iconic company motto painted on the side of the Hurd Millwork building in downtown Medford. The building will be repainted after the layers of paint are removed.

Vox Pop

Contact congressmen, senators about need for postal service

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 Medford, Rib Lake, Gilman 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.)

Vox Pop

Good Samaritan or busybody?

I went to a local store to pick up a couple of quick items. I was in the store approximately five minutes or so when a page came over the intercom, "Dog in silver SUV." I went to the service desk to answer the page. I was informed a "customer complained about my dog being in the vehicle." I explained I will only be in the store a few minutes and my windows were down a few inches (mind you there was an overcast sky).

I got what I needed, returned to my vehicle to find two employees there. I explained I was in the store a brief amount of time and my windows were down, in which the reply was, "They're not down enough." Then they proceeded to write my plate number down.

"Good Samaritan or busybody?" First, the customer who complained had no idea I just left my vehicle, but they wanted to complain. I could see if they saw my dog in the vehicle, did their shopping, came out and my dog was still in the vehicle after a period of time.

Second, to be greeted by two employees and told my windows are not down enough. Hello, is not this my animal and vehicle? Then after the fact writing my plate number down. All this within a short period of time.

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.

— **Fredric Rolando, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers**

I'm sorry for those of you who have animals and keep them home under lock and key, but my guy likes his car and car rides and yes, he barks because he doesn't get to come into the store with me. I love my animals and I do take them places. So I think next time you want to complain, call the police and make a scene by someone's vehicle, know the facts. Do not be the one who is quick to judge. If you don't know the facts keep your nose out of it. "Only God can judge."

— **Randy Michetti, Rib Lake**

Vox Pop

Return stolen chair

To the person who stole my lawn chair at the Rib Lake Car Show. I want you to know my daughter-in-law hand made the Chevy Bow-tie as a father's day gift.

When your conscience bothers you, please drop it off at my house. My address is on the arm rest.

— **Vernon Brost, Medford**



Wouldn't It Be Nice...

Brian Wilson

Priorities

What was the most important thing you did this week?

Was it the time you sat in the meeting taking notes and paying attention as people argued about matters of procedure? Was it when you watched 10 men who want to be president trade barbs in the hope of saying something quote-worthy so voters and campaign donors would remember their name?

Or was it something else. A moment of quiet reflection on a life?

Friday would have been Alton Cain's 84th birthday.

That fact was shared by Pastor David Clements talking to the more than 100 of us crowded under a tent in Cain's park-like yard in the town of Medford. Outside the tent, a light rain fell, matching the somber and subdued mood of those present. The patter of raindrops and the sounds of dripping water was a backdrop for the celebration of life service.

I had met Alton and his wife Marilyn last year when she contacted me to let me know a group of Medford veterans would be going on the Never Forgotten Honor Flight. Through a series of circumstances that fell into place, I ended up going on that flight with them. I got to know Alton and hear his stories of circling the globe on a Navy destroyer and of the traditions aboard ship for the first time sailors crossed the equator.



County veterans service officer Jeff Hein with the flag presented to Alton Cain's widow as part of the military rites held as part a celebration of life service for the Korean War era veteran.

I knew Alton was in poor health at the time of the trip. This made it all the more important to ensure his stories were recorded and shared. This is something that needs to happen with all our veterans so their stories of service and sacrifice are recorded as witnesses to history to counterbalance the heavily politicized versions put out by textbook publishers and academics.

I kept up contact seeing the family at events. At Harvest Days, my daughter and her best friend delivered fresh baked pumpkin muffins to him and spent some time visiting him. They sat next to me at Friday's service, my daughter having come home for the second day this summer from her job at the Girl Scout camp north of Merrill, and her friend delaying a camping trip with her family in order to attend. Saying goodbye was an obligation neither of the teen-aged girls even considered skipping out on.

Services, such as Alton Cain's celebration of life, are for the living. They are a time for people to remember someone who touched their lives. Sometimes this touch was as a parent or spouse, others were touched as co-workers or neighbors. Even the lightest and most passing of touches leaves an imprint. We are changed by the people we meet and whose stories we take time to learn.

There was sorrow on Friday as the clouds wept. It could be seen on the faces of Alton's family and friends. It came through in the story of Alton's final days and how his wife sat by his side throughout those long hours and how his last words were for her.

Just as the rain was desperately needed for farmers' crops to grow, the tears shed for Alton were soon replaced by smiles and laughter at remembered happier times and shared experiences. Memories, such as Alton using a tractor to pull a sled full of children around the yard on a cold winter day, were shared and stories told of a man who worked hard and cared deeply.

What was the most important thing you did this week? For me, it was taking a few hours from a busy day to remember a man I met seemingly by chance, but I sometimes wonder if it might have been something more. Although I only knew him a brief time on his journey here on earth, I will carry his memory with me for many years to come.

Brian Wilson is News Editor at The Star News.