

Our City

Some of you may remember the Marvelettes? If you have watched or read the regional news lately, one of their hits will ring a bell. If not, this may just pass you by. As we enter this second half of the decade, sometimes I wonder if indeed so much progress is a good thing; or if for many of us in the end it will just pass us by and leave us to wait longer still.

I had occasion to speak on the phone with Mayor Blad this past Wednesday. Somehow we got sidetracked and began talking about growing up in the “pucker brush.” For those of you unfamiliar with pucker brush, it is akin to the boonies, out in the sticks, or in our case, the middle of nowhere. Although at different ends, we both were born and spent our early years in remote parts of Nevada. He in Panaca and me eight miles south of Mountain City (the City part is a huge misnomer). If you don’t know where Panaca is, it is between Caliente and Pioche. Mountain City is between Elko and Mountain Home, the pucker brush, 80 plus miles to anything. In Idaho it would be like living in Clyde. As I grew up, Dad got transferred to Ashton, then I started spending my summers on more remote ranches in Nevada.

When I was 13, I met Sally. When I was 14, she and her family moved to Nairobi, Kenya. That summer I was on the Taylor Ranch, which is about 25 miles south of Wells, Nevada. Even at that age, in 1974, I expected service to be a hell of a lot faster than it was as I waited every day for the postman to deliver the little blue Aerograms that sometimes took almost a month to reach me. To be fair, it took longer on her end.

If you have been watching or reading the news, you will know the relevance of the above and my reference to the Marvelettes and their hit “Mr. Postman.” If as planned the Pocatello, United States Postal Service (USPS) distribution center closes in April, those of us in eastern Idaho, western Wyoming and southwestern Montana can expect to be waiting for the postman to deliver in one direction or another for a lot longer than we currently do. Depending on the turn-around time in the Salt Lake center, folks in Clyde and other remote portions of the region may have better luck reestablishing the Pony Express. I am only slightly joking.

Brian Sperry, regional spokesman for USPS, states “stamped First-Class Mail currently takes between one and three days to reach its destination anywhere in the nation depending on the distance traveled; beginning in 2015 it will take between two and three days to reach its destination.” When mail used to be sorted here in American Falls, I sometimes received letters the same day, now it goes to Pocatello and often takes three days. Add two more handlings at Salt Lake and back to Pocatello to American Falls, experience tells me I am looking at five days, not the same three. The ladies at City Hall all agree it will take at least two more days and we are only 22 miles from Pocatello. Clyde, good luck!

The mission statement of the USPS reads: The Postal Service shall have as its basic function the obligation to provide postal services to bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people. It shall provide prompt, reliable, and efficient services to patrons in all areas and shall render postal services to all communities.

Nowhere in the Mission Statement does it say “at the convenience of the US Postal Service.” The word “obligation” would be binding to me. But because most of the US west of the Mississippi is rural, regional metropolitan distribution centers are being implemented and in effect turning rural citizens of the west into second class citizens. Our first class stamps no longer provide one day delivery to even local recipients. If I were a conspiracy theorist, I would say it is all a plot to entice us to drive more and deliver our own mail, which could cause fuel prices to go back up so the oil conglomerates could regain the profits they have been losing. But, then those same low fuel prices should allow for decreased costs for the prompt, reliable, and efficient services to patrons in all areas and shall render postal services to all communities; which is part of the stated premise for closing the smaller regional distribution centers like Pocatello - the Postal Service needs to cut costs.

The simple question would be then – Cut costs at whose expense? For the folks that continue to live in places where Mayor Blad and I grew up, forget about five days and add a week or even two. Recently I had the occasion to write our Governor and Lieutenant Governor letters; and because of our City Council schedule they had to be delivered the next day to be relevant. If the Pocatello postal distribution center were closed I would have to drive those same letters to Boise, for them to make any difference in the resolution between Magnida and ConAgra. Folks living in the most rural parts of our region who are dependent on the Postal Service to deliver life-saving prescriptions will need to change the way they live and provide even more for themselves. If they live on fixed income, they may be out of luck. Businesses who have been operating on an even playing field will concede a huge advantage to those already within the Salt Lake City metropolitan area. Their mail will take much longer and cost more to reach their customers. Where is the equity in such a plan?

The mission statement of the US Postal Service is not found in our Constitution or Bill of Rights, but it is a basic service that has long held this Nation together. If you want the service to remain in place you need to make your thoughts and needs known. I would do it sooner rather than later. Contact Brian Sperry, Regional Spokesperson for the USPS, at: brian.s.sperry@usps.gov or 303-313-5132. It would have cost me \$1.95 to find his mailing address by doing a telephone number search on the internet. But, the 303 area code is in Denver anyway, it will be quicker for you to email or phone him with your concerns related to the Postal Service’s decision on the distribution center in Pocatello. Which will take another .48¢ out of their coffers, but then that is exactly the point they are trying to make if you have heard or read anything Mr. Sperry has said in the past year that is relevant to this topic. You can also contact Representative Mike Simpson at 275 S. 5th Ave. #275, Pocatello, ID 83201, telephone 208-233-2222 or at his Washington D.C. office at 2312 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515, 202-225-5531 as he is trying to help stop the closure.

Yes, the way the Nation is bound together has changed somewhat in the last decade. The ways we use personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence has also changed to a degree. The timely delivered letter or package remains critical or even life changing.

I didn’t intend to go “postal” on you through the entire column. I had a lot more that I wanted to share. But in the words of the Marvelettes, you will have “Wait a minute, wait a minute...”

Until next week...