

# POSTAL NEWS

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## 1. Pat Pankratz: Keep those cards and letters

March 13, 2010

It is no surprise that our federal government is drowning in a sea of debt.

Millions of Americans this week received a one-page form letter in the mail — addressed to "resident at" — from our friends at the U.S. Census Bureau.

The letter reminds us that we'll all be receiving another piece of mail in about a week — the actual Census form.

Now there's news! We've been hearing about the Census for months now, but the Commerce Department sees fit to spend millions on a mailing to remind us about something we already know.

Don't be surprised if the actual Census form contains the same plea from Census Bureau Director Robert Groves contained in the "pre- letter."

Fill out the form, we'll be informed again, because an accurate count makes it more likely that communities will get their "fair share of government funds for highways, schools, health facilities and many other programs."

It is indeed important to fill out the Census form, but it's also important to save money so there is more cash in government coffers for these vital programs.

Oops. I just used "save money" and "government" in the same sentence. That was a slip for which I sincerely apologize.

Perhaps the one government agency that can truly appreciate this Census mail dump is the U.S. Postal Service, which is struggling with debt so high that it threatens to leave our mailboxes empty on Saturdays.

After all, the more mail there is to deliver, the better for the USPS. No matter that the mail is costly to produce and relatively useless. If it's deliverable, our postal service says bring it on.

The postal service compounds the problem with some of its own deliveries.

A recent foldable solicitation, for example, touts the advantages of buying stamps by mail. I don't pretend to run the cost-benefit analysis on this sort of thing, but the first-class mailing indicates all postage and fees are paid by the Postal Service.

The agency needs to sell a lot of stamps to cover the millions of dollars spent to hawk stamps to millions of "postal customer" addresses throughout the country. I doubt it's a break-even proposition, but that's never stopped the government before.

Would we know stamps are available by mail without this friendly reminder? Perhaps not, but placing downloadable forms on the Postal Service Web site, [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com), likely would do the trick just fine.

Government, of course, does not hold a monopoly on mail most of us would rather not receive. During the time it took to write this column, my work e-mail inbox received cyber-mailings about a hospital in Greece certified to implant an artificial heart, a summer internship available with an organization called The Jerusalem Fund, a video available on YouTube from a DePere magician and something about setting up an account for medications via the Internet.

It's easy enough to hit the delete button on these kinds of "mailings." The damage is minimal because it's not causing my overtaxed wallet to open and free the moths.

It's another story when the government does it, however.

Agency mass mailings are inconvenient and annoying, for sure, but they're also costing us money.

The grand-scheme impact of the latest Census Bureau and Postal Service solicitations may actually be minimal. However, a lot of minimal actions lead in one direction — to the land of taxed to the max.

We live in that land, continuing to hope that government will one day realize there are ways to cut back on spending.

Until that day I have a simple request.

Keep those cards and letters.

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## **2. U.S. Postal Service is still an important medium for communication**

By Other Voices

March 12, 2010, 4:02AM

I read the March 3 article about the U.S. Postal Service's predicament: It's facing revenue losses and considering cost-cutting measures like eliminating Saturday delivery. Earlier that day, my husband had left for work (he's a mail carrier), and I had

written thank-you notes to put in our mailbox for our mail carrier to pick up. I had checked and sent e-mail and taken care of business by telephone. My point is, the U.S. Postal Service is part of the array of communication media that keep my life and work connected.

What some people call "snail mail" is often fast enough for the purpose, and sometimes vital for the circumstances. Our Amish neighbors don't have access to the Internet, but a letter mailed today will be in their mailbox tomorrow.

Plus, real mail makes sense; it's literally sensual. The very presence by sight, weight, volume, color, texture, fragrance and even sound (some cards have sound chips!) can deliver joy, beauty, comfort, humor and love long after a calendar date or life milestone has passed.

Mail carriers are professionals, good will ambassadors and sometimes heroes -- my husband moved a 3-foot snow boulder blocking a customer's driveway last week.

Let's remember we're human as we strive to be efficient.

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