

# Congress Uses Gimmick for Pay Hike

## Editorial Opinion

### We Thank You W. Elm 700 Block

Wasn't that a wonderful piece of neighborhood cooperation on the part of the residents of the 700 block of West Elm Street just before Christmas? In case you missed it we'll tell you about it.

Each resident in the block placed luminaria beside his or her main sidewalk as well as the walks leading to their homes. Simple brown paper bags with sand in the bottom for stability and a lighted candle placed in the sand made for an outstanding neighborhood scene. Then they placed an advertisement in The Herald and invited us all to come and share their Yuletide light with them.

It is this neighborly spirit that helps to make Christmas what it is and we thank the 700 Blockers for their efforts.

Our thanks also go to the many families who took time and effort and spent considerable money to decorate with lights and Christmas ornaments on and around their homes. It all added to the holiday festivities.

Also, we must add a "shame on you" to those nitwits who each year get their jollies from smashing light bulbs and destroying outdoor displays. It takes all kinds but luckily we have so many more of the right kind.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Members of Congress hate voting themselves pay raises. But when they feel the need, the roll call vote usually is close, in deference to the adage: "Vote no and take the dough."

This year, members of both houses — feeling the pinch of inflation but fearing voter reaction if they raised their salaries — found another way of climbing aboard the gravy train.

They lowered their own taxes and doubled the amount they can get for making speeches — usually to special interest groups.

Until this year, members received \$60,660.50 salary and could deduct up to \$3,000 on tax returns for travel, food and laundry expenses for having to live in Washington as well as in their home state.

Members still receive \$60,660.50 in salary, but as the result of action taken recently in Congress, they now can deduct handsomely not only for expenses but also for the value of their expensive Washington housing.

The Senate vote on the expense deductions, justifying the "vote no and take the dough" adage, was 46-44, with three senators — Joseph Biden (D-Del.), William Roth (R-Del.) and John Chafee (R-R.I.) — first voting yes and then no when it became apparent the measure would pass. The House went along by voice vote.

Both houses also adopted an amendment allowing an even bigger potential tax break by letting members deduct certain expenses for buying or renting a Washington home and maintaining it.

Exactly how much a tax break members gave themselves may not be known for some time. The living expense deductions — applicable only to the member and not his family — could depend on how much he or she eats, pays for rent or whether laundry is sent out.

With new homes in the Washington area — those suitable for congressional styles — costing at least \$200,000, depreciation on them as business expenses could be substantial.

The explanation for the new tax rules went like this:

Bachelors living in Washington could deduct all their expenses, while members living with their families could not, on grounds that it would be considered a non-deductible "vacation home" if a spouse or children stayed more than two weeks.

Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kan.) called that "silly," contending devoted fathers and mothers would have to allocate deductible expenses down to each room, lamp and portion of food. The amendments, he said, would

simply equalize an unfair situation.

Sen. Bennett Johnston (D-La.) jokingly suggested the amount of room a spouse takes up in the bedroom might be called into question.

Rep. Barber Conable (R-N.Y.) said the IRS was not willing to issue guidelines for the deductions without specific instructions from Congress

and that they were needed "so 535 members of Congress would not have audits automatically."

The day before, the House doubled from \$9,000 to \$18,000 the ceiling on members' outside earnings. At the end of September, the Senate lifted its \$25,000 ceiling at the same time Congress was removing the \$3,000 limita-

tion on expense deductions.

On the House side, the matter was accomplished without debate in about 20 seconds. When opponents found out about it, there was nothing they could do but express outrage.

"People think we're all a bunch of greedy creeps...this time we deserve it," said Rep. Lynn Martin (R-Ill.)



### Educational Standards

The controversy about minimum competency tests has diminished. There is still opposition to them as well as misunderstanding about them. Nevertheless 38 states have adopted minimum competency standards of one sort or another. About 17 require passing the test in addition to traditional course requirements before awarding a high school diploma.

Harvard education professor Stephen Baily, who knows better, illustrates the misunderstanding about the tests when he says: "Either the standard is so easy that it isn't very meaningful. Or it could be hard, and that's politically unacceptable."

The standard for most competency tests includes determining that students can display their academic skills at a level expected of ninth grade students and can also meet such challenges in daily life as filling out a job or license application correctly, following instructions in a cookbook recipe, making change or reading a bus schedule. The question is whether this is all a high school diploma should mean.

The answer is, "No." But it is necessary to move a step at a time. For now at least, the test should not be used to determine that a student has qualified academically for graduation.

The National Education Association has led the opposition to competency testing. It need not have. Associate professor Diane Ravitch of Columbia Teachers College in New York points out: "It's the parents and taxpayers and legislators reacting to an academic decline. The public is saying to the school people, 'You may not want standards, but we do.' But (the standards) are often being defined and implemented by people who were against them in the first place, and that's a problem."

Beyond sabotaging the tests, NEW supporters could do design and score them that they show its members doing a grand job. This might mean that students get the same brush off they got before the tests were adopted. Among educators, legislators and even parents, unfortunately, what the students need and get are largely irrelevant in this confrontation.

### Newspaper Most Believable

Consumers are more likely to believe advertising in newspapers than advertising in any of the four other leading media, according to a research study presented at a recent meeting of the Newspaper Research Council.

Of 1,001 respondents asked to select the medium with the most believable advertising, 42 percent chose newspapers. Television placed a distant second with 26 percent, magazines and radio each received 11 percent, and direct mail 5 percent.

On a five-point believability scale, newspapers once again scored

highest, with 68 percent calling newspaper advertising "believable" or "very believable." Scores for other media were: radio 59 percent, magazines 52 percent, television 34 percent, and direct mail 25 percent.

The highest believability rating for newspaper advertising — 80 percent — came from single respondents and those in the 18-24 age group.

Segments of the population which rated newspapers at 70 percent or better included those between 25 and 44 years of age, those with at least some college education, and those with incomes of \$20,000 or more.

### Yesteryear in Titusville

From the Files of The First Daily Paper in the Oil Region

DECEMBER 29, 1981

Oil took quite a boom yesterday and the market was a lively one.

Quite a number of our people have signified their intention of visiting Oil City Friday to listen to and applaud Thomas Keene, the tragedian.

Many of our merchants are clearing out their holiday stock by a series of raffles for valuable prizes. People who are favored by good luck in general will probably invest heavily.

DECEMBER 29, 1906

Manager Harry Gerson of the Titusville Opera House announces the engagement of the Partello stock company for next week. The company was in Titusville at Thanksgiving and played to big business.

If indications point correctly, it will be a strenuous season in municipal business. The paving of Main Street alone is a gigantic undertaking.

A Holland woman goes to Java to discover the missing link: With Count Boni still in the flesh. It is peculiar that she should have been compelled to look further in the interests of science.

DECEMBER 29, 1931

After the weekend which featured weather quite like winter, there was a light, misty rain which formed an icy coating on walks and pavements making both walking and motoring somewhat hazardous.

Four defendants, one woman and three men faced Magistrate R. A. Kerr yesterday on the charge of being drunk. One of the men was fined \$25 which was later paid by the woman. The woman was fined but not sentenced, due to illness in her family. The other two men were fined.

DECEMBER 29, 1956

A deer was on the loose in town. The animal ran across the Titusville Hospital lawn as if a black panther was after it. It was last seen tearing up North First Street.

The family of the late Joseph Seep of Titusville were guests yesterday at the official opening of the newly-remodeled offices of the South Penn Oil Company, Oil City.

The Titusville Chamber of Commerce has learned that the new city directories will be complete in about a month.

**VENISON SPOILS QUICKLY** — Deer meat should be processed as quickly as possible. Skinning out the animal also helps reduce the chance of spoilage, the Game Commission says.

Hanging deer from camp poles may not be the best idea, the commission says, adding it has had reports of such deer being stolen or eaten by bears.

### Roots-Seekers Budget Victims

WASHINGTON (AP) — To save \$250,000 and eliminate 17 jobs, the government has quit lending microfilmed Census Bureau records to the nation's libraries, where people could use them to trace family histories.

The roots-seekers have fallen victim to federal budget cuts.

Until the loan program stopped Dec. 10, amateur genealogists could ask any of 4,000 local libraries to borrow the Census Bureau's house-to-house surveys from the National Archives, the storehouse of federal records. The government charged nothing for making them available.

But now, to see the records, genealogists will have to visit the archives' Washington headquarters or 11 branches at Bayonne, N.J.; Waltham, Mass.; Philadelphia, Pa.; East Point, Ga.; Chicago, Ill.;

Denver, Colo.; San Bruno, Calif.; Laguna Niguel, Calif.; Seattle, Wash.; Kansas City; or Fort Worth, Texas.

For people trying to trace their backgrounds, few government documents are as illuminating as those compiled by the decennial house-to-house census, listing by name and age every occupant of every residence in the country. Under law, census records are opened to the public 70 years after a census is conducted.

A handful of libraries own full or partial sets of these records, but most do not.

As an aid to people trying to locate records that are no longer readily available, the Census Bureau is surveying libraries and other institutions. It plans to publish a directory of collections next spring.

But inevitably, the decision to shelve the government's microfilm loan program will hinder genealogy, an activity that became a preoccupation for millions of people a few years ago.

Interest in drawing family trees was spurred by "Roots," Alex Haley's best-seller novel in which he retraced his lineage back to Africa.

In 1974, before "Roots," the archives sent 10,421 rolls of microfilmed Census Bureau records to libraries. But lately the government was lending microfilm at the rate of 35,000 rolls a month.

Assistant archivist James W. Moore said he hopes to get the service restored through a private company. He said cutting out the loan program saved the government \$250,000 and eliminated the equivalent of 17 full-time jobs.

### Kick the Post Office Can

By PAUL HARVEY  
"Hardee-har-har-har, that's one on the Post Office."

You've heard it again, that somebody's letter mailed in 1915 did not get delivered until last week.

You've heard that the Pony Express is faster than Uncle Sam's Post Office; somebody in Idaho proved it.

You heard Robert Orben say that this was the first Christmas his young son did not write a letter to Santa Claus: "He still believes in Santa Claus but he does not believe in the Post Office anymore."

"Hardee-har-har-har." When a goof-off mailman dumps his undelivered accumulation in the river, it's "news" nationwide.

But when a rural mail carrier in Kewadin, Mich., on her own time and at her own expense, answers personally every letter addressed to "Santa Claus," who ever hears of Joyce Grammer?

It's good for a national chortle when Paul Harvey suggests that the way to get our mail delivered on time "would

be to send postal workers their checks by mail."

He should have done his homework; he'd have learned that many mail carriers do receive their paychecks by mail.

Big city post offices focus noisy news on themselves with exposes relating to thievery, laziness and misuse of narcotics by overpaid sorting-room personnel...

Yet there is little concern and there are no tears for the 8,000 underpaid mail carriers who got dog-bit last year.

When people who can remember two-cent postage stamps have to pay 20, the first reaction is to stick pins in the postman...

Forgetting that the postal rate increase of 33 percent over the past three years was less than the overall inflation rate of 40 percent.

Ten years ago our Post Office handled 85 billion pieces of mail; this year 110 billion.

That's a 25 percent increase in mail delivered with "fewer employees now

than then."

Automation of postal procedures has increased efficiency by 38 percent.

Then we come to the winter weather factor and its inherent hazards. For two months of every year most mail carriers are out in weather the rest of us stay in.

Or like West Virginia rural carrier Thurman Poe, they're getting shot at by somebody who "thought he was a deer."

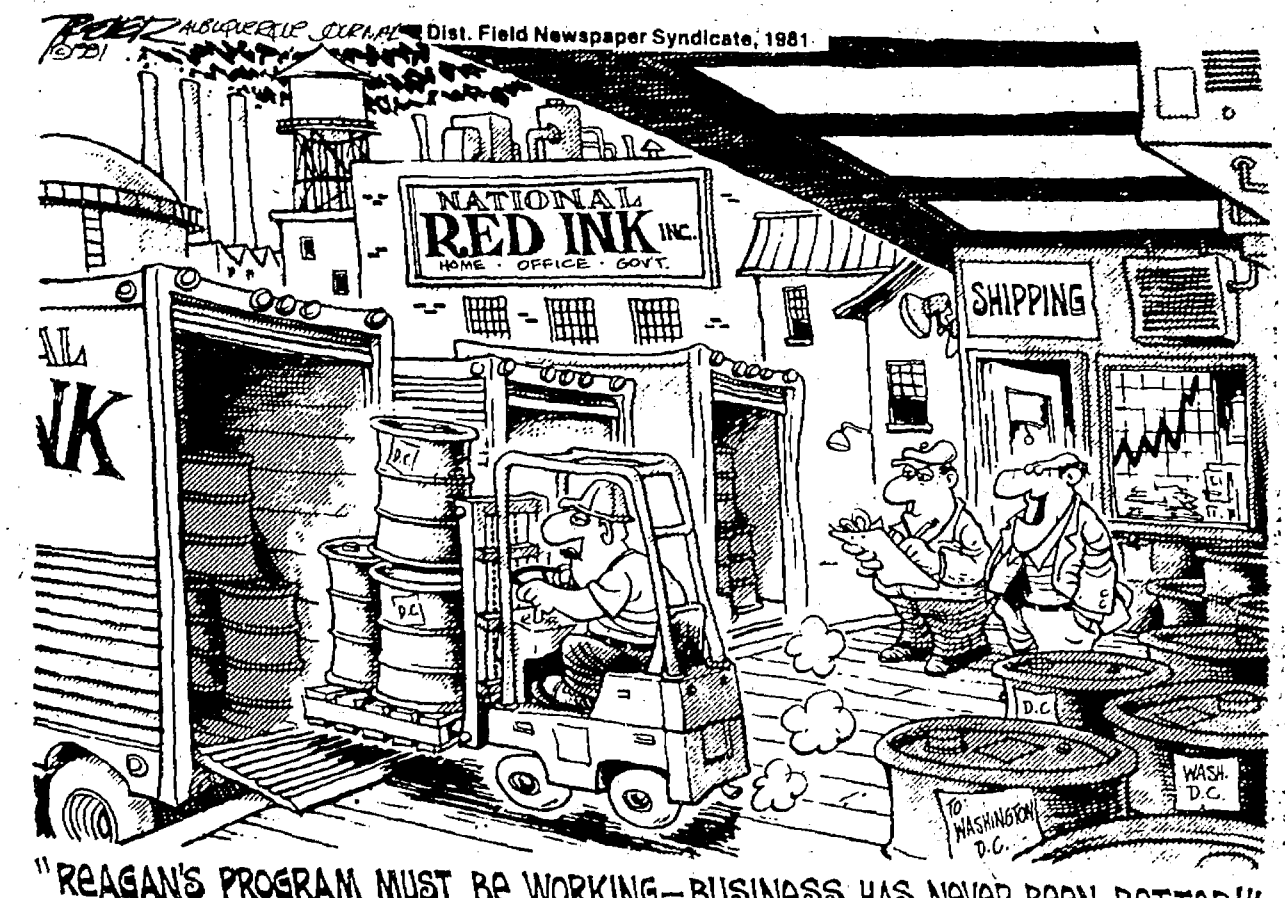
I've picked on the Post Office in essays and anecdotes past — and will again.

You postal people are a convenient scapegoat.

You're the tin can in the street that everybody kicks just because it's there.

So it seemed appropriate at this season when you delivered 72 million Christmas greetings every day to other people for somebody else to deliver at least one small one for you.

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### The Titusville Herald

ESTABLISHED JUNE 14, 1865  
Vol. 117, No. 166

The First Daily Published Source of Oil Information in the World and the Oldest Continuously Published Daily in Northwestern Pennsylvania

(USPS 431-765)

Published daily except Sundays and holidays by The Titusville Herald, Inc., 209 West Spring Street, Titusville, Pa. 16354. Second class postage paid at Titusville, Pa. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Titusville Herald, P.O. Box 324, Titusville, Pa. 16354.

Subscriptions must be paid in advance. By mail outside Titusville in first through fourth postal zones \$55 per year. All other zones \$60. Home carrier delivery \$5.00 per month

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