Opinion

NCR Voices



(Unsplash/Ethan Hoover)



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This city seems more chaotic than usual — divisive, dysfunctional and divided.

But there are a couple of things that can bring together the U.S. House of Representatives delegation from Western Missouri: The Kansas City Chiefs and the U.S. Postal Service.

The National Football League franchise brings cheers.

The U.S. Postal Service brings jeers.

And don't we know it.

If you are a print subscriber to National Catholic Reporter, you know that getting your newspaper in a timely fashion is like winning the lottery. You might be luckier to purchase a lottery ticket.

Just ask Jo Ann Schierhoff. Jo Ann is our customer service representative and circulation manager, and when your paper doesn't arrive, she's the one who picks up the phone. It has been ringing off the hook lately.

A native of Kansas City, Missouri, Jo Ann was the middle of five children — as she will puckishly tell you (inside joke) — and like any middle child of a big Catholic family, she's tough. That's mandatory when dealing with the post office, where NCR drops off 20,000 or so newspapers every two weeks to be mailed to readers.

Jo Ann keeps track of how long the paper takes to get from the Bulk Mail Processing Center in Kansas City, Missouri, back to NCR's office on Armour Boulevard, about 4 miles away. For recent editions, the delay has been as long as 17 days.

Enter the congressional delegation from the Kansas City area, which is co-sponsoring what the lawmakers are calling the Pony Up Act. The bipartisan legislation would require USPS to pay any late fees incurred on bills due to delayed delivery service — late fees like on your water or electricity bill.

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The sponsors are Democratic Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II, the congressman whose district is where NCR's headquarters is located, and Republican Reps. Sam Graves, whose district is north of KC, and Mark Alford, whose district is south. Cleaver noted delays are costing small businesses, like NCR, "their hard-earned dollars." Graves said, "The Postal Service isn't getting the job done."

My Washington office is near the U.S. Capitol and in the past month I have bumped into Cleaver twice. After the congressman commented favorably on my Chiefs winter gear, I raised NCR's longstanding U.S. mail problems. Both times. The congressman said that he, Graves and Alford were on it.

But the bill in the last Congress didn't get a hearing and never made it out of committee. NCR certainly has late expenses when the paper never arrives, because Jo Ann mails out a new one.

A year ago in January, more than 275 readers never got their NCR print edition. Jo Ann mailed all the extras she had at the USPS cost of $2.50 each, for a cost of $687.50, plus about $80 in envelopes and $40 for the reprints.

This year's Jan. 17 edition seems lost in transit. One copy in January was mailed to my brother, who lives in South Kansas City, Missouri, about 18 miles away. It took 18 days. That's about a mile a day. The Pony Express would have been faster.

Which is how they came up with the double entendre for the legislation, of course.

You can help us. If your paper comes late, please let the Postal Service know. Contact USPS Consumer Affairs Manager (Mid-America) Connie Mori at 816-374-9186 or USPS Postal Customer Council (Kansas City) Jennifer Nelson at 816-374-9119 or Jennifer.R.Nelson@usps.gov.

Or you send them a letter to 315 W. Pershing Road, Room 502, Kansas City MO 64108-9631. Good luck with that.

Go Chiefs!