
BUSINESS MAILERS REVIEW

*Monitoring the Postal Service, Private Carriers and Suppliers
Published by PNMSI Publishing Co.*

Volume 38, Number 1

January 3, 2017

One Small Step for the PRC

On Dec. 10, the Senate approved President Barack Obama's renominations of two Republicans to the Postal Regulatory Commission, the body that is charged with overseeing the USPS. The reappointed commissioners are Robert G. Taub and Mark Acton. President Obama made Taub the PRC chairman, removing the "acting chairman" title he gave Taub two years ago. The appointees' respective histories at the PRC are described at <http://www.ecommercebytes.com/cab/abn/y16/m12/i21/s02>.

The Senate ignored President Obama's other long-stalled nominations to the Postal Service's board of governors. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) objected to presidential nominees on what is supposed to be a

panel of nine presidentially appointed members.

Linn's Stamps speculates that: "The action on the regulators and the inaction on the governors speaks to what postmasters general don't like to concede: Congress might be happier regulating the Postal Service with a board of full-time commissioners than with a board of nine part-time appointees." It points out that: "After all, the Postal Regulatory Commission is a creature of Congress." Read the website's speculation as to how the Trump administration might modify USPS management at <http://www.linns.com/news/postal-updates/2016/december/senate-approves-reappointments-postal-regulatory-commission.html>.

PRC Work Underway

Reappointment of two PRC appointees was opportune. On Dec. 20, the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) begins its review of the system for regulating rates and classes for Market Dominant products that was first established in 2006. The law requires that the PRC begin its review of the current rate system ten years after the date of enactment of the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, to determine whether it is achieving the objectives established by Congress. If the PRC finds that the objectives, taking into account the factors, are not being met, it has the authority to either propose rules that modify the system or adopt an alternative system to achieve the objectives. Order No. 3673 outlines the parameters and timing by which the PRC will complete its review.

The PRC's review will engage in a comprehen-

sive evaluation of all aspects of the ratemaking system provided within 39 U.S.C. section 3622, including:

- The annual limitation on the percentage changes in rates
- The schedule for rate changes
- The forty-five-day notice before the implementation of rate adjustments
- Expedited rate changes due to extraordinary or exceptional circumstances
- Class level application of the annual limitation
- The rounding of rates and fees
- The use of unused rate authority
- Worksharing discounts

Comments are due no later than March 20, 2017. Reply comments will not be accepted. The PRC has placed a link entitled, "10 Year Rate System Review" on the homepage of its website, www.prc.gov, to simplify comment filing for members of the general public.

Chart-Topping Breach Revealed

The FBI is investigating the breach of 1 billion Yahoo user accounts, according to a White House spokesman. "There was a previously reported breach that the FBI had previously indicated that they were investigating and they're investigating this situation as well, so I'll let them speak to what they have found over the course of that investigation thus far," White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said during a press briefing.

Yahoo revealed that an unknown third-party accessed personal information for the billion users in 2013 in what the company says is a separate incident from the breach of 500 million accounts that it says took place in 2014 and revealed in September 2016.

Stolen information includes names, passwords, and security questions and answers. Included also was the account information for 150,000 U.S. government and

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Short Takes

EMVCo, the coalition of major card networks that sets and enforces the EMV security standard around the world, recently revealed that EMV chip cards still represent a small share of the card market. As of Q4/FY2015, there were 394 million EMV chip cards in the US. Although this sounds significant, it represents only 26% of the market. Only 7% of card-present transactions were through EMV in the U.S. in 2016, which is up from 0.26% in 2015. Most of the adoptions of new chip-card readers have been by major retailers. Adoption of the new readers by smaller retailers is needed to enhance the protections afforded in card-present transactions. Smaller retailers represent about 54% of total U.S. sales.

U.S. District Court Judge James Robart recently rejected an argument by Amazon.com Inc. that production of customer information in a class action consumer lawsuit would violate the confidentiality promises it made to its customers. Amazon was asked to produce sales records in a case against hair products retailer WEN, which has agreed to pay \$25 to everyone who bought its conditioner, and up to \$20,000 to shoppers who had a bad reaction to it. Attorneys reportedly want the Amazon customer information to notify those who bought WEN products on the site about the case's settlement. Amazon is not a party in the lawsuit and its customers were not first asked if they wished to be identified to plaintiff's counsel. That counsel has agreed to keep confidential the information it seeks. <http://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/291714/amazon-ordered-to-disclose-customers-names.html>.

Amazon now has a patent on measures to secure and protect drones while in flight to deliver packages, the U.S. Patent Office confirmed, according to CNBC. The security measures reportedly would protect a drone from hacking of its on-board communication and data systems. The patent also refers to how delivery drones could be connected to a mesh network to communicate and exchange location data, and that techniques such as encryption, frequency hopping and spread-spectrum could be used to prevent malicious interference with deliveries. *Retail Wire* describes the technology as follows: "a huge 'airborne fulfillment

center' that would hover above the earth at about 45,000 feet and, from its store of products, fulfill delivery orders via dispatched drones. As described in the filing, the blimp might be deployed for specific events, for example, positioned far above a football stadium and stocked with products that fans might order." <http://www.retailwire.com/amazon-patents-high-altitude-drone-dispatching-fulfillment-center-blimp>.

United Parcel Service, Inc. (UPS) has acquired an interest in reverse logistics startup Optoro to improve both the transportation and disposition of returns and excess inventory this post-holiday season, *The Wall Street Journal* reports. Optoro applies algorithm-based analytics to determine where the retailer will best recover its losses on returned items. In January, UPS expects to handle more than 5.8 million returned packages a week, with 1.3 million alone expected to be returned on January 5. Given the surge in expected returns that day, UPS has labeled it "National Returns Day."

The United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit has ruled that, to prove employer retaliation under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), a plaintiff must prove the supervisor had clear knowledge of the plaintiff's decision to take family medical leave. Robert Chase, a U.S. postal worker, injured his shoulder during work hours and applied for worker's compensation, reports the *National Law Review*, but his supervisor discouraged him from doing so. Chase also applied for and later took family medical leave, which in later testimony, the supervisor denied knowing.

After exhausting his family medical leave, Chase remained out on medical leave until he was fired in 2011. Throughout Chase's leave, his supervisor called Chase's injury fake and mocked him, at one point stating that Chase was "the biggest fraud when it comes to injuries." After his termination, Chase sued for retaliation under the FMLA. He claimed that his supervisor fired him because he went out on medical leave. But the supervisor claimed he was unaware of the medical leave and had received no documentation of it. The claimant failed to provide documentation as proof.

The court believed the supervisor's statement that he retaliated for Chase's workers' compensation claim, and not for the decision to take medical leave.

The USPS won in part because of the supervisor's ignorance of the procedures for, and protections afforded because of the employee's medical leave status.

Chart Topping Breach Revealed... (cont. from page 1)

military employees, *Bloomberg Technology* reported. Those accounts provided official government email addresses from the White House, National Security

Agency, FBI, CIA and other agencies as password recovery backups.

2016 Ends

After an acrimonious presidential election, a surprising election result, and a sometimes unsettling transition of power, the 2016 holiday season finally came to an end. The precise results remain unclear, but some emerging patterns suggest that it did not end as badly as some feared and others predicted.

Fears

Back in September, *Retail Dive* wrote about the fears that a nasty presidential race might hinder holiday spirits and sales: “There’s never been a presidential election cycle quite like this before. The highly contentious nature of the primaries ultimately resulted in the selection of two historically unfavorable candidates, leaving consumers—and retailers—feeling uneasy about this year’s presidential election.” <http://www.retaildive.com/news/how-the-presidential-election-is-distracting-holiday-shoppers/426406/>. The magazine then pegged pessimism high at 31% based on an August survey gauging retailer sentiment on holiday spending conducted by market research firm Fung Global Retail & Technology and predictive analytics provider First Insight. The survey found the majority of the 102 industry leaders surveyed believed the election would have a “strong impact” on consumer spending during the second half of 2016. At the time, none of those surveyed could have predicted the highs and lows of presidential polls’ predictions or their failure to predict accurately the election’s outcome.

Predictions

The National Retail Federation (NRF) estimated that online sales would reach a record \$117 billion during the holiday season covering November and December, up 11% from \$105 billion in 2015. Some said this was overly optimistic and described NRF predictions as *often* overly optimistic.

The USPS predicted in a press release, it expected to deliver over 16 billion cards, letters, and packages during the 2016 holiday season, including 750 million packages. That’s 12% more than during the 2015 holiday season.

According to *Time*, Dec. 19 was expected to be the busiest day of 2016 for the USPS: “When Christmas falls on a Sunday, data shows that the Monday after the last holiday shopping weekend is traditionally the busiest

day for mailing things, says USPS senior public relations representative Sue Brennan. The USPS plans to process a total of 611 million packages and letters just today.” In that same story, the magazine reported: “the USPS also said peak delivery day will be on Thursday, Dec. 22, when they expect to deliver 30 million packages.” <http://time.com/4606471/peak-mail-day-2016/>.

Philly.com reported on Dec. 22 that: “FedEx Corp., the No. 2 package-delivery company in the United States, forecasts a record volume this holiday peak season: 317 million shipments between Black Friday and Christmas Eve.” Its private competitor, United Parcel Service, Inc. also predicted a growth year. <http://www.philly.com/philly/business/FedEx-deluged-by-online-shipments.html>.

It will take another week to finish the November to December tallies.

Cyber Monday

Cyber Monday exceeded many expectations. Adobe Digital Insights unit of Adobe Inc. reports that U.S. shoppers spent \$3.45 billion online this year, making Cyber Monday the biggest online shopping day in the United States. That meant 12.1% growth from \$3.07 billion on Cyber Monday 2015, and a bit higher than Adobe’s forecast of \$3.36 billion when Cyber Monday began.

Cyber Monday’s \$3.45 billion ecommerce figure beat Black Friday’s \$3.34 billion total by just 3.3%.

Adobe does not break down individual sales for Saturday and Sunday of the Thanksgiving weekend. Retailers reported growth for three main days of that five-day stretch:

- Thanksgiving: \$1.93 billion, up 11.5% year over year from \$1.7 billion.
- Black Friday: \$3.34 billion, up 21.6% year over year from \$2.74 billion.
- Cyber Monday: \$3.45 billion, up 12.1% year over year from \$3.07 billion.

Some analysts speculated that customers wore out their wallets with Thanksgiving Day online shopping. Data from digital marketing firm HookLogic Inc. showed shoppers spent more per order on average on Thanksgiving than any of the five days of the holiday

weekend. HookLogic client data broke out as follows:

- Thanksgiving: \$160.20
- Black Friday: \$142.20
- Saturday: \$138.70
- Sunday: \$137.70
- Cyber Monday: \$139.00

HookLogic explained the \$21 dropoff in average order value from Thanksgiving to Cyber Monday as something other than shoppers' fatigue. It pointed to retailers offering deeper discounts on Cyber Monday.

HookLogic's client data also shows that Cyber Monday 2016 drew 15.2% more online shoppers than last year. <https://www.internetretailer.com/2016/11/29/cyber-monday-biggest-online-shopping-day-us>.

Mobile

The final week of December analysts reported that mobile device use was driving holiday success for some ecommerce and retail businesses. "Mobile devices are responsible for \$24.55 billion in sales so far this holiday season, according to the Adobe Digital Insights unit of Adobe Inc. This data accounts for sales between Nov. 1-Dec. 20, based on aggregated data from 23.4 billion visits to retail websites. Adobe defines the holiday season as November and December.

Smartphones supply 68% of the mobile spend at \$16.63 billion, compared with tablets making up 32% of mobile sales at \$7.92 billion. Tamara Gaffney, principal analyst at Adobe, expects the holiday weekend to be a mobile shopper's free-for-all. "Mobile tends to get bigger again as soon as everyone takes off for the holiday," Gaffney says. "Christmas Day is our projected largest mobile share day of the season." She attributes this to consumers being at home on their smartphones and tablets, as opposed to sitting on their desktops and laptops at work. Mobile devices supply 31% of online sales between Nov. 1-Dec. 20, with smartphones accounting for 21% and tablets 10%. Mobile's share of

total web sales for all of holiday 2015 was 28%. Mobile accounted for 19% in of holiday online commerce in 2014, Gaffney says." <https://www.internetretailer.com/2016/12/21/small-screens-bring-big-holiday-sales>.

Holiday shopping and celebrating took place concurrently over the Thanksgiving weekend, too. "Consumers had no qualms shoveling in turkey with one hand and shopping with the other on Thanksgiving Day, according to a study from live chat provider LivePerson Inc." The study of 1000 U.S. consumers conducted after Cyber Monday found that 6.5% of consumers shopped online while at the Thanksgiving table, according to *Internet Retailer*.

"The biggest problem consumers had shopping during the weekend was out-of-stock products, as 53% of consumers say this was a problem, followed by slow loading websites at 37%," it reported. <https://www.internetretailer.com/2016/12/05/65-us-consumers-shopped-during-thanksgiving-dinner>.

Service Delays

The biggest disappointment over the holiday season for many was the failure of some carriers to make good at the time of delivery. People living in buildings that provided access for deliveries at their doors reported that items were left at front desks, sometimes at a different building. People living in homes reported that no one rang the doorbell or knocked before leaving a tag on the door with instructions for picking up items at a distribution center. Trainees left items in unfamiliar places. <http://www.philly.com/philly/business/FedEx-deluged-by-online-shipments.html>; <https://www.consumeraffairs.com/delivery/fedex-shipping.html>. As some complained, if you have to go someplace else to get the package, it becomes increasingly easier to go buy the item at a retail store.

Sales Tax Developments

The U.S. Supreme Court recently declined to review a challenge to a Colorado tax law that requires retailers to turn over the names and online purchase information of state residents. State officials have yet to issue any guidance as to how the law will be executed or enforced. The Colorado law, which was passed in 2010, is not being enforced as of this time.

The law requires online retailers, including businesses with no physical presence (or nexus) in Colorado, to send a notification to shoppers living in the state who

spend more than \$500 annually with them, and the law requires the retailers to file an annual report with the state's Department of Revenue with customers' names, purchase amounts, and addresses so that the state knows the "use tax" owed by consumers. Use taxes are levied by states in lieu of sales taxes.

Analysts expect other states to adopt similar laws. South Dakota and Vermont already have added a similar law to their books. Ten or more states have some legislation in the works.

Many Happy Returns

Retailers must accept returns, though the cost of doing so can reach up to \$260 billion dollars, CNBC reported last month. The rate of returns for ecommerce businesses tend to be higher: 30% overall or 40% for clothing. This translates into lost profits. Products returned are rarely resold at full price. Thus, a matching loss of 10% to 40% results from ecommerce returns.

Recurring and Rising Costs

Ecommerce returns are particularly costly because of the need to ship them. Ecommerce sales also produce more returns and each type of return brings its own set of challenges to the ecommerce vendor and its delivery company.

Retailers describe at least four types of customer returns: (1) commercial returns, (2) product recalls, (3) repairable returns, and (4) end-of-life returns. Each requires a different reverse logistics response.

Unfortunately, most returns represent a limited opportunity for cost recovery. Some estimate retailers can recover up to 32% of the total product cost by having an effective reverse logistics function. This includes reselling the product, recycling it, or remanufacturing it. <http://www.businessinsider.com/reverse-logistics-and-reverse-supply-chain-research-returns-recalls-repairs-and-end-of-life-returns-2016-10>. Retailers and e-tailers are on the hunt for methods for reducing the existence and costs of returns.

New Solutions

Reverse logistics remains a challenge for shippers and their customers. This year will be no different, despite some efforts to ease the process of returning ecommerce packages. Despite these improvements, many retailers will lose money in the form of product waste, improper utilization of space, and the loss of potential future sales.

Best Buy has attempted to lower losses by listing in-store returns on its website, enabling re-purchase from anywhere the retailer already ships. It has also increased protective packaging to reduce damage during shipping. One way to accomplish this is to track returns handled by a particular delivery company to see whose packaging and handling might be contributing to returns.

Robot Brigade

The Transformers movie franchise is just one reminder that a vehicle that operates without a human directing it is more than a robot. Now that wireless phones and watches have gone from fiction to fact, will the car and truck make similar advances?

In a new report, *BI Intelligence* discusses what it will take for autonomously operated cars and trucks to drive

GameStop and AutoZone adapted their distribution strategies to take advantage of in-store returns.

As *Supply Chain Dive* explains: “At the end of the day, the supply chain manager cannot control for customer satisfaction, but they can control for packaging, excess inventory, and determine reverse distribution strategies.” <http://www.supplychaindive.com/news/reverse-logistics-returns-supply-management/432665/>.

Some delivery companies are working on ways to ease their customers' reverse logistics processes. As noted below (*BMR 01/02/2017, p. 2*), United Parcel Service, Inc. (UPS) recently acquired an interest in D.C.-based reverse logistics start-up company Optoro. Optoro seeks to create innovative software solutions, empowering retailers to determine the fate of the product at the point of first touch.

“When goods come back as a return, suddenly they can be in five or six different conditions. It could be new sealed, new sealed damaged box, it could be open box, lightly used, heavily used, broken . . . and every single one of those conditions could have a different disposition and a different price point,” Optoro co-founder and CEO Tobin Moore told *Supply Chain Dive*.

Optoro's software identifies these conditions and then, through data analytics, assigns a path for greatest recovered value—whether through recycling, resale to consumer through ecommerce, return to vendor for a minor credit, liquidation to parts, or upstream replacement.

UPS feels it has done well and will continue to do well in getting packages to someone's doorstep, and beginning the reverse handling. “[A]dd that together with what Optoro does on the back end, we really think no-one else can create an end-to-end solution like that for retailers,” UPS Vice President for Global Retail and B2C Strategy Steve Brill told *Supply Chain Dive*. <http://www.retaildive.com/news/ups-invests-in-reverse-logistics-startup-optoro-readies-for-national-retur/432966/>. It cannot hurt to hold down those costs.

from the silver screen to roadways: “Connected, Self-Driving, Autonomous and Driverless are all phrases describing the direction in which automakers and tech companies are steering the car. We have never seen such revolutionary developments in the auto industry. The transformation is happening much faster than expected, but there are still many barriers that have to be

overcome to make some of these advancements a reality.”

Most analysts define a self-driving car as any car with features that allow it to accelerate, brake, or steer a car's course with limited or no driver interaction. A number of cars already have such features. It is expected that, by 2020, nearly 10 million cars with self-driving car features will be on the road. These will be user operated cars, not fully autonomous ones. <http://www.businessinsider.com/report-10-million-self-driving-cars-will-be-on-the-road-by-2020-2015-5-6>.

Google already is testing a driverless minivan. <http://www.businessinsider.com/waymo-alphabet-google-self-driving-car-company-fiat-chrysler-minivan-photos-2016-12>. Trucking and logistics companies are tallying the safety and other benefits of new technology for trucks and self-driving truck features. <http://cerasis.com/2016/12/19/trends-in-supply-chain/>. Uber, Lyft, and at least sixteen others are exploring creation of a driverless taxi.

Recently, Uber moved its road testing of a driverless taxi from California to Arizona to escape what it regarded as stringent safety regulations. The local DMV revoked the registration of Uber's autonomous vehicles. That stopped the company's San Francisco test of the vehicle. For its part, the state objected to Uber's registration of cars not marked as "test cars." The company could have complied with the rules that applied to its test, but decided

Drones Eying the Roads

Ford would like to use drones to help self-driving cars quickly map areas off the road that they cannot safely navigate with the sensors and cameras they are equipped with, according to TechRadar. This combination of new technologies could assist self-driving cars in identifying road conditions their cameras and sensors cannot anticipate.

In particular, Ford's focus is on off-road driving. The company has in planning a drone launched from a moving vehicle that could, for example, help the car navigate through woods. Data collected from one vehicle might even be made available to other vehicles.

Drone technology offers other synergies with self-

Augmented Reality Delivered

The USPS used a new app aimed at building “excitement between senders and recipients of gifts” mailed through Priority Mail boxes. That is right. To try the new app, customers needed to first buy a Priority Mail box for a package. Customers could choose from two different animated messages: a penguin with some other animal friends near an igloo, or a reindeer in Christmas lights.

to load the vehicles on its self-driving truck and haul them to a friendlier state.

Business Insider reports that an Uber spokesperson said: “Our cars departed for Arizona this morning by truck. We'll be expanding our self-driving pilot there in the next few weeks, and we're excited to have the support of Governor Ducey.”

Arizona's governor said in a statement: “Arizona welcomes Uber self-driving cars with open arms and wide open roads. While California puts the brakes on innovation and change with more bureaucracy and more regulation, Arizona is paving the way for new technology and new businesses.” <http://www.businessinsider.com/uber-self-driving-cars-leave-california-for-arizona-2016-12>. Google still plans to test its driverless auto on California roads this summer.

Manufacturers predict a fully autonomous self-driving car will be available in 2019. *BI Intelligence* expects these first cars to be user operated, not driverless. It will take a while for traffic laws and insurance policies to adapt to the changes required for driverless cars. The impetus is expected to be there to make such changes. According to *BI Intelligence*, “The biggest benefits of self-driving cars are that they will help to make roads safer and people's lives easier. In the UK, KPMG estimates that self-driving cars will lead to 2,500 fewer deaths between 2014 and 2030.”

driving vehicles. Drone manufacturers and software providers' work on geo-fencing and collision avoidance that will make flying drones safer may one day make cars safer. New safety regulations for drones may make easier the adoption of new regulations for self-driving vehicles.

With drone sales expected to exceed \$12 billion in 2021, up from just over \$8 billion last year, the possibilities for synergistic growth may be out of sight today, but within view shortly. <http://www.businessinsider.com/drones-might-be-able-to-help-self-driving-cars-2016-12>.

“Our app adds that special touch by delivering cheer when mailing and receiving holiday gifts via Priority Mail,” USPS executive vice president James Cochrane said in a statement. “In addition to offering this entertaining app *delivercheer.com* allows you to buy stamps, order free boxes, schedule a free package pickup, find post office and collection box locations and

determine mailing dates.”

To use the app, buy a Priority Mail box, go to delivercheer.com and scan the blue shield on the side of the package or enter your tracking number. The app

FedEx Makes New Friends

FedEx Corp. (FedEx) has trimmed its retailer customer base and achieved record growth. “As e-commerce grows, so does the challenge of peak, with multiple days of volume levels approaching or surpassing double our average daily volume,” Mike Glenn, president and CEO, FedEx Services, said during the company’s 2Q/FY2017 earnings call.

“Over the last several months or so, we have made some decisions to discontinue relationships with a few customers where we couldn’t candidly agree on pricing and capacity requirements for this peak season,” Glenn said. “That’s something we do on a regular basis, but we made that decision earlier this year. And as a result of that, we have been managing volumes and we will continue to do that. But clearly it’s had some effect on this peak season. That was intentional on our part and we will continue to do that going forward,” he said, according to a *Seeking Alpha* transcript.

Average daily package volume for FedEx Ground was 8 million in the quarter ended Nov. 30, up 5.3% from 7.6 million in the same period last year

also allows the receiver to take a photo or video of the package-opening experience and create a “thank you” message with an animated snowman or gingerbread man.

(SPLY). FedEx Ground’s revenue per package in 2Q/FY2017 was \$7.95, up 4.1% from \$7.64 in the SPLY.

The company has its eye firmly on B2B deliveries. “E-commerce is basically residential deliveries, and you have to keep in balance the business-to-business and the business-to-consumer e-commerce or you can put extreme pressure on our Ground business. That is exactly what we were doing in making the decisions on these accounts that Mike mentioned,” CEO Fred Smith said. The USPS is the biggest carrier for B2C ecommerce, he said, and “it makes no money out of it. That should tell you something right there. They are making millions of stops a day.”

For the 2Q/FY2017 ended Nov. 30, FedEx reported:

- Total revenue of \$14.93 billion, up 19.9% from \$12.45 billion in the SPLY.
- FedEx Ground revenue of \$4.42 billion, up 9.1% from \$4.05 billion.
- Revenue from FedEx Express of \$6.74 billion, up 2.3% from \$6.59 billion.
- Net income of \$700 million, up 1.3% from \$691 million.

Doing the Penguin Walk

United Parcel Service, Inc. brought us the right turn only approach to deliveries. Now Deutsche Post DHL Group brings us the penguin walk. Deutsche Post DHL Group, one of the world’s largest logistics companies, is training its couriers to walk like penguins when negotiating their way across icy streets and sidewalks.

The company hosted a penguin residing at a local zoo as part of its presentation.

The “Safety First - Safety Feet” employee safety training program held in November featured an African penguin that demonstrated how to walk on slippery surfaces by adopting its careful gait.

DC Velocity reports that the training was repeated at two Kentucky locations. <http://www.dcvelocity.com/articles/20161206-dhl-teaches-its-couriers-to-march-like-a-penguin/>. *HR Dive* reports that: “Since penguins have a low center of gravity and flippers instead of wings, it’s easy to translate these ideas to the couriers who can use this style of walking to prevent slips and falls on the job. Besides, penguins are super cute (therefore, a huge learning retention draw) and have a strong personality. A big plus: They also have their own little uniforms.” <http://www.hrdive.com/news/dhl-uses-penguins-to-help-train-couriers-to-walk-on-ice/432182/>.

Kicking the CR Down the Road

After much debate and delay, on Dec. 9, the Senate voted 63-36 to prevent a government shutdown that would have closed federal agencies at midnight. The president signed the continuing resolution (CR) to keep the federal government open through April 28. If shutdown had occurred, it would have been short-

lived. Senate procedures would have allowed passage of the CR, despite the senators’ opposition. The White House said it would have allowed agencies to continue to function normally even if the appropriations had technically lapsed, so long as a vote to restore government seemed imminent.

Briefs

In late November, a mail carrier assisted a family’s escape from a home after the porch caught fire. West Hills fire Chief Don Blasko said the fire started with something in the kitchen. Two people were home when the fire started and made it out safely, thanks to the mail carrier who saw flames coming from the porch. He ran to the front door, pounded on it, and helped get them out safely. <http://wjactv.com/news/local/mailman-sees-house-fire-saves-residents-inside>.

Jeff Jones, a mail carrier for three months leading up to Christmas, saved the holiday for a family on his route in McKinney, Tex. Four days before the holiday, Jones saw smoke coming from the front of a home where he needed to drop off a parcel. He knocked on the door. When children inside the home did not open the door, he correctly surmised that they were following instructions not to answer. He dialed 911 and stayed on site waiting for emergency assistance. Meanwhile, the smoke turned to flames.

According to the local ABC-TV affiliate, Jeff’s quick action to notify police and fire may have saved lives and owner Cheryl Richard’s home. “Richard says Jones initially tried to put the fire out himself, but the garden hose was burned up. With help from an officer, he got the kids and grandma out. McKinney firefighters moved quickly to put the fire out.” “For him to have that kind of love for my kids and concern for my kids. . . [H]e is a wonderful person,” Richard said. <http://www.wfaa.com/news/local/collin-county/mckinney-mailman-saves-family-from-house-fire/379506890>.

Accounts of seasonal mail theft and related

arrests have been numerous. Here are only a few of the many recent reports.

Denver7 reported on Dec. 23 that two postal workers were being investigated for letter theft. <http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/investigations/allegations-of-employee-mail-theft-at-lakewood-post-office-under-investigation>. On the same day, Hawaiian postal officials warned of an “uptick” in mail theft, including: theft of “a blue mail collection box— bolted to a concrete sidewalk” in front of the Kapolei post office. <http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/34124559/its-that-time-of-year-usps-warns-of-uptick-in-mail-theft>.

On Dec. 25, it was reported that a couple arrested for drug-related offenses in St. Joseph County, Mich. may have had in their possession mail stolen from local residents. <http://woodtv.com/2016/12/25/st-joseph-co-authorities-investigate-couple-for-mail-theft/>.

On Dec. 26, an ABC-TV affiliate reported that residents in West Omaha, Neb. reported mail stolen from their mailboxes and porches. <http://www.ketv.com/article/residents-concerned-over-christmas-mail-theft-in-west-omaha-neighborhoods/8538173>. On the same day, the Missoula, Mont. police arrested six persons for stealing residents’ outgoing mail and cashing, or attempting to cash, checks stolen from the mails. <http://www.kpax.com/story/34131788/warning-issued-in-wake-of-missoula-mail-theft-ring-arrests>.

On Dec. 27, *USA Today* reported that a Dec. 9 break-in at the Shasta Post Office in California involved theft from post office boxes, including the box used to receive payments for local water bills. The county water company notified customers that they should stop payment on checks made out and not yet credited to accounts. <http://www.redding.com/story/news/crime/2016/12/27/water-company-burdened-mail-theft/95895116/>. So much for holiday spirit.

BUSINESS MAILERS REVIEW (ISSN: 0739-3873) is published biweekly by PNMSI Publishing Co., an independent newsletter firm. Subscriptions to **BUSINESS MAILERS REVIEW** are \$497/year in the U.S., Canada and Mexico; delivered airmail for \$527 elsewhere. Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by PNMSI Publishing Co. for libraries and other users upon request. **BUSINESS MAILERS REVIEW** is available electronically via e-mail. Contact the circulation department at 301-528-7777, or email to support@pnmsi.com. © 2017 by PNMSI Publishing Co.

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