



Free Press Viewpoint

'Pretzelizing' stems from partisanship

Apparently it makes no difference where you are. The political mess is there.

In Washington, the Democrats control both the House and the Senate and thus are the target of an angry public. And rightfully so.

In Topeka, the Republicans control both the House and the Senate, and thus are the target of an angry public. Or they should be.

How in the world did we ever get ourselves in such a pretzelized condition?

Most of us would point the finger at Topeka and Washington. And that's probably fair.

But we the people are not without blame.

Aren't we the people responsible for those who serve us in Topeka and Washington? Darn right we are.

Do we individually challenge our elected officials? Rarely. "Hey, they're one of us. They're good old boys." Therein lies the problem.

Apathy. Easily satisfied.

Don't make waves.

If you're a Republican in a Republican state, dare you vote for a Democrat?

If you're a Democrat in a Democrat state, dare you vote for a Republican?

And so it goes, like a merry-go-round.

The end result is record-breaking debt.

Harsh words.

Jobs in the millions lost.

Budgets cut to the bone.

Fingers pointing all over the place.

We've gotten so far away from accountability of those we elect to represent us that the bleeding wound is in fact self inflicted.

Is this going to change?

Don't think so.

The only time we seem to show any interest at all in what's going on is during an election year.

What about those years in between? Don't they count?

When you hear people talking over a cup of coffee about "Kicking the bums out," whose bums are they talking about? Certainly not theirs.

So collectively, the bums are safe.

But it doesn't look like we are.

Nothing's going to change.

Stay the course.

But isn't that the way it was intended to be all along?

Whoa. Not so fast, there. Didn't the most Democratic state in the nation just elect a Republican to the United States Senate, to fill a vacancy left by the death of probably the most prominent Democratic figure in the country? Massachusetts now has Sen. Scott Brown sitting in the chair occupied by Sen. Ted Kennedy for more years than a lot of people can count.

Maybe that was a flicker of hope.

— Tom Dreiling

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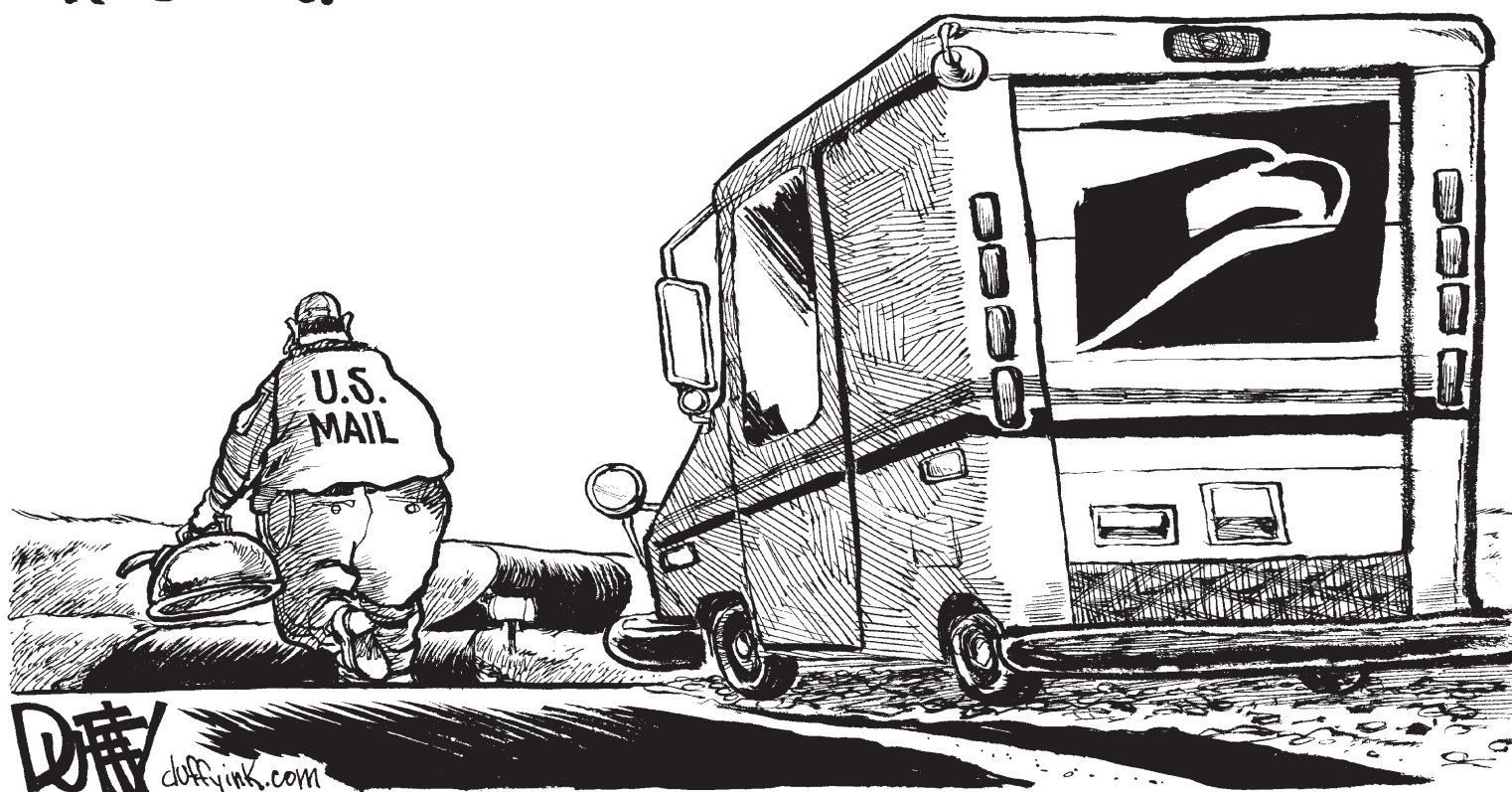
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NEITHER SNOW, NOR RAIN, BUT LACK OF CASH WILL KEEP THE POSTAL SERVICE FROM ITS APPOINTED ROUNDS.



Human-animal interactions complicated

A rare tragedy — where a performing killer whale killed his trainer — has revealed widespread ignorance among the public about animals and their behavior.

In replies to online blogs, many think that these animals were captured in the wild and should be returned back into the wild.

Many believe the myth portrayed in the film "Free Willy." In real life, "Willy" was a killer whale named Keiko. Keiko's fate was described in the July 2009 issue of the journal *Marine Mammal Science*: "...Keiko's release to the wild was not successful, since though physically unrestricted and free to leave, he kept returning to his caretakers for food and company." He died in December 2003, at half his life expectancy, from pneumonia. He never integrated into wild killer whale pods.

Another release in 2002, of a lost killer whale named "Springer," was successful because she had been in captivity only a month, was a juvenile, and returned to her maternal group. That brings us to the second wrong assumption: that all of these animals were captured as adults from the wild. But for rescued orphans, or born-in-captivity dolphins, to release them to the wild would be a death sentence.

Most Kansans know that human-animal interaction built this country in pioneer times. And animals are built into our rural life today. The Great Plains were settled by hard working folks using horses and oxen, not modern cars and trucks and tractors. Today's horse owner,



John Richard Schrock

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whether a leisure rider or ranch hand, will tell you that this animal-human relationship is a mutually beneficial one. These animals take care of us. And we care for them.

But no relationship is without risks. Horses stumble in gopher holes. Riders get thrown.

Those who would ban ocean parks for safety reasons have a bad argument. By far the most dangerous action a person can take is getting into a car. Similar to the rest of life, human-animal interactions have risks.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports about 1.5 million car accidents with deer each year, for a total of \$1 billion in vehicle damage, over 10,000 injuries, and about 150 human fatalities per year.

Even on the coasts, where folks may not be so aware of their historical heritage with animals, they have pet dogs. Dogs have the longest history of domestication. Many of us share the mutual pleasure of their company. Nevertheless, there are more than 4 million dog bites annually, about 1,000 per day treated in emergency rooms, and there were 33 fatal

dog attacks in 2007. There are variations in the degree of domestication among animals, and good reason to question the wisdom of untrained citizens keeping a cute mountain lion "kitten."

But just as riders know their horses, ocean park trainers are highly skilled with their unique animals. There is no reason to question that these animals feel any less satisfaction than the sheep dogs that help us herd, or the horses that help us corral cattle. These marine mammals provide an up-close educational experience for thousands of people, an exciting ecological and scientific understanding that no simulation can replace.

We must be careful that our reaction to these rare fatalities does not play into the hands of those who would eliminate all human interaction with animals, from farming to zoos, from rodeos to school labs, and for everyone who has pets, from dogs to cats to hamsters and fish.

The animal rightist who would stop our relationship with these magnificent animals today, will want to end your "enslavement" of your child's puppy dog tomorrow.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Farmers' need for insurance is 'critical'

Farmers in western Kansas need affordable, readily accessible crop insurance. Today's stakes are too high not to have this important tool available.

That was the consensus of nearly 100 landowners, farmers, suppliers and others vested in agriculture at meetings in Goodland and Ulysses sponsored by Kansas Farm Bureau last month.

The Feb. 25 meetings were designed to allow farmers to provide input and voice their concerns about the federal Risk Management Agency's proposed elimination of crop insurance on continuous planting of some nonirrigated acres. A part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the agency has concluded this practice is too high risk to warrant insurance coverage.

The agency has proposed dropping insurance products that provide coverage for these second crops in 18 counties in western Kansas, plus parts of eastern Colorado and western Nebraska.

"I would really like RMA to sit back and take another look at what they're proposing," says Maurice Miller, who farms in Lane and Scott counties in southwestern Kansas. "We must have the opportunity to put in that second (summer) crop and we need insurance on that second crop. Insurance is an integral part of our farming program."

One of the younger farmers at the meetings was Clayton Janicke from Cheyenne County. This northwestern Kansas farmer is 100-percent no till.

Janicke says he no longer drags iron through his fields and operates a more intensive rotation without any fallow periods. He believes minimum till and no-till farming will provide higher yields on his farm which in turn make



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

crop insurance all that much more important.

"With the potential for greater yields and more income, crop insurance is absolutely essential for my farming business," Janicke says. "One hailstorm or another year of drought would be catastrophic for us. Without insurance for my crops, I'd be hung out to dry if and when I suffer a crop failure."

Like the other western Kansas farmers who attended the meetings, Janicke believes the government has used data from too narrow a time period, 1999 – 2008.

According to records, this 10-year period was the second driest period dating back to 1895, second only to the Dust Bowl period of the "Dirty Thirties." Western Kansas farmers would prefer the agency look at a 20 to 30-year period.

These same farmers would like the government to consider recent changes in cropping practices which can produce crops with less moisture, including no till and minimum tillage, improved crop genetics and safer pesticides.

Another northwestern Kansas farmer, Gerry Franklin from Sherman County, would like the agency to consider the current culture of farming in this part of the state.

"We must be opportunistic out here," Franklin explained. "When we have enough moisture and the conditions look favorable to pro-

duce a crop, we need to be able to plant such a crop and know if we do have a drought, hail or some other act of God, we can protect ourselves."

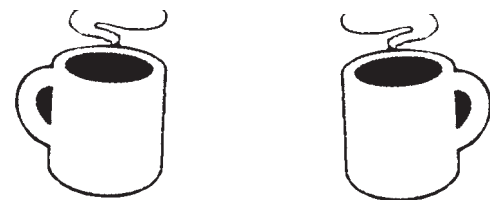
The protection he and the other farmers were talking about is crop insurance. Western Kansas crop growers have always been quick to try new crop rotations that benefit their bottom line. This includes continuously planting nonirrigated acres.

"You can't penalize these producers for hail, drought and Mother Nature," says Steve Baccus, state Farm Bureau president and an Ottawa County farmer. "Because of their high input costs, machinery costs and cash rents, they cannot afford to let this land lay idle. It has to be placed into production throughout the year."

Eliminating crop insurance will not work for farmers in western Kansas, Baccus says. He pledged to take the suggestions and ideas of farmers at the two meetings to the agency.

"We're going to tell RMA not to make any changes immediately," Baccus says. "Let's hold the line for 2010 and 2011. We are committed to a workable solution for our farmers and RMA."

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.



Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

