

## Other Viewpoints

### Don't give inmates personal data access

There are some types of work that are entirely appropriate to place in the hands of prison inmates.

Tasks that give inmates access to state residents' Social Security numbers and other personal data aren't among them.

Yet that's what Kansas allows under a program started in 1985. The state is one of eight that gives prisoners access to personal information through data-entry services provided to government organizations and nonprofits.

It's a practice that, while well-intentioned, needs to end. Kansas Department of Corrections officials say the data-entry program helps inmates obtain job skills and saves taxpayer dollars by reducing costs for state and local government. They say oversight of the inmates in the program is tight and that there have been no documented cases of private information being used to commit identity theft.

But an audit from the Social Security Administration's office of inspector general said a Kansas prison inmate was caught attempting to steal private information in 2009, which is a scary prospect.

A growing number of lawmakers believe it's time to cut inmates' access to the information, and they're absolutely right.

The Social Security Administration plans to propose a ban, and there are two federal bills before lawmakers that would do the same thing.

Meanwhile, the chairwoman of the Kansas House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee said she would work to end the program.

"This is like having the fox practice herding chickens," said the chairwoman, Rep. Pat Colloton, R-Leawood, in a story distributed by the Associated Press. "This is a really bad idea."

Agreed. Not that it's a bad idea to give inmates job skills training. It's a very good one.

Joblessness and crime go hand in hand. It stands to reason that vocational training could help inmates land a job after being released, and perhaps not return to prison.

It's also not necessarily a bad idea to teach inmates data entry skills. But doing it in a way that gives them access to personal information isn't the way to go.

Consumers are vulnerable enough to identity theft without their information being made available to prison inmates.

— Topeka Capital-Journal, via The Associated Press

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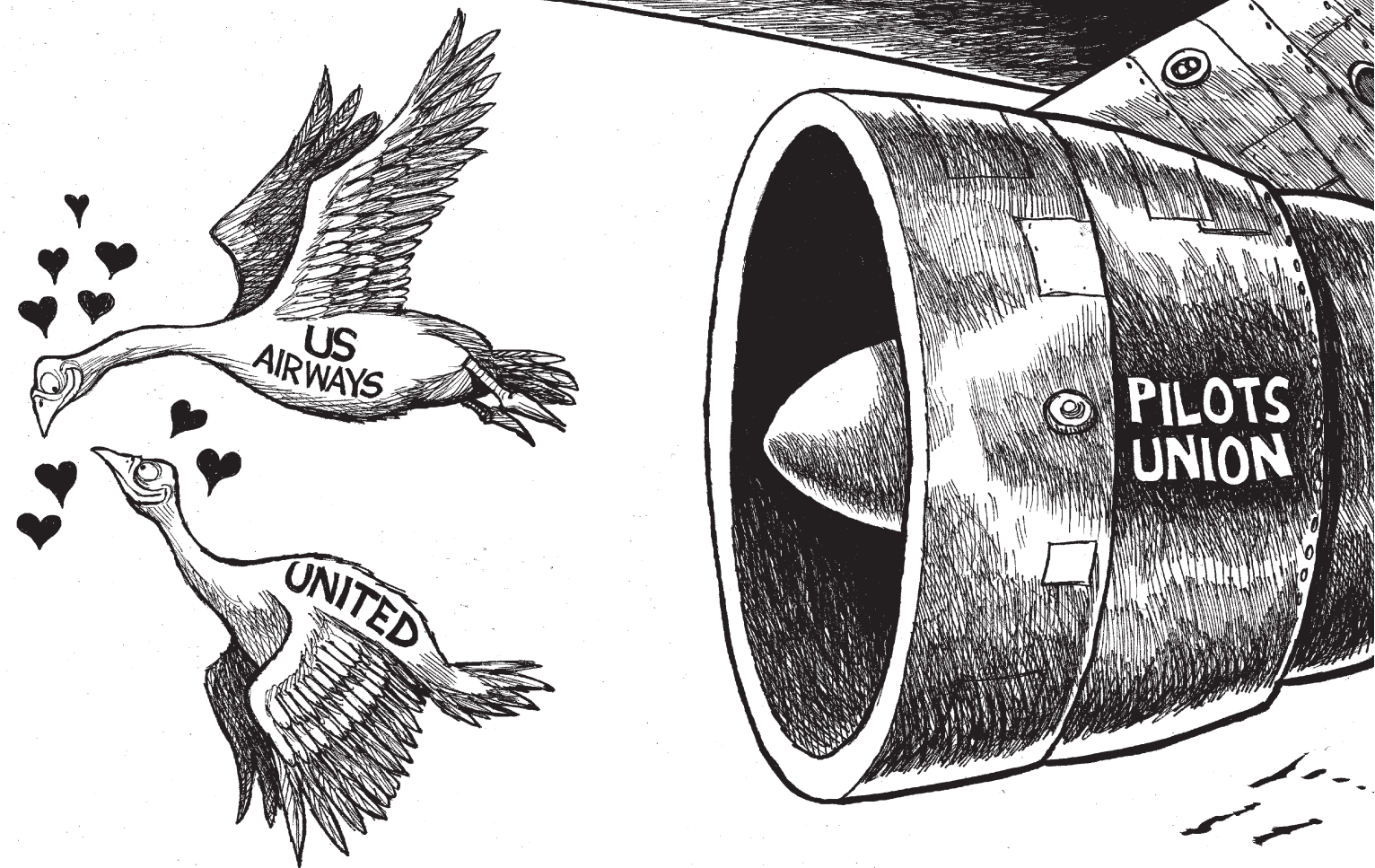
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### Abandoned kitten got lucky

There's a new kitten at our house, with a loud, demanding voice and a bold and forceful personality. He's not a baby, but he's no adult, either.

He does not fit in particularly well with the rest of the menagerie. He tries to catch the fish and chases the old great-grandmother cat. The dog seems to think he's OK, but that dog likes everybody.

Sooner or later, this little guy will settle in. He'll grow up, he'll learn when demands are likely to be noticed and when they will be ignored.

The kitten was not planned. He arrived one day when my daughter-in-law saw him sitting beside the Interstate. There was another kitten with him, though that one was already dead.

They did not get there by themselves, thumbing a ride or hiking cross-country. Someone took them out there and dumped them, without food or water or resources of any kind.

They were not wild, but housebroken, raised by their mother, and then dragged from their home. They were victims of humans: victims of poor planning, or poor birth control, or simply poor understanding of what happens to house pets when they are suddenly set down in the middle of nowhere.

This is what happens. Without a great deal



**Marian Ballard**

• Collection Connections

of luck, or the combination of sharp eyes and compassion in a passing driver, both kittens would be long dead.

It's been said, but it needs to be said again.

Don't get a pet if you don't intend to make it a permanent part of your family. Like children, they need to be fed, and cleaned up after, and given regular medical care. They need to be taught good manners. They need vaccinations. They need a home that will not suddenly disappear in a few months, because they will be around for years to come.

Unlike children — though some parents may at times be tempted to this — they need to be neutered. Unless you can think of a specific, important reason for a next generation, you need to take your little guy kitty or your little girl puppy and make sure they don't make more puppies and kitties. Because a new generation often means unwanted animals with no

homes who are abandoned or destroyed. There is never a shortage of animals to adopt, just a shortage of available homes.

There's a footnote to all this: Sometimes parents fall for a plea and get an exotic pet, one that is not usually found in homes. At this time of year, some may have a baby bunny or some baby chicks that were Easter gifts for children, and are already becoming burdens.

Please don't just kick them out. They will become cat food in almost any neighborhood.

Find them homes. Baby chicks generally live in chicken houses, with other chickens. Baby bunnies are often raised as pets or 4-H projects. Take the time to do it right. After all, you had the time to bring them home.

Most of all, put yourself in the animal's position. I doubt that anyone who considered the feelings of a kitten would abandon it beside a high-speed freeway, even if it needed a new home.

Once in a while, an abandoned pet might get lucky.

More often, they just get dead.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

### No more bacon and eggs?

I love to eat. Like millions of fellow Americans, there's nothing better than the food grown and produced on this nation's farms and ranches.

I'll eat a thick, choice rib-eye steak hot off the grill any time. And make sure it has all the fixings — baked potatoes, steamed green beans, salad, fresh bread and a glass of red wine.

I also like a home-cooked omelet with my Sunday morning paper. You know, the kind, three eggs filled with sautéed mushrooms, diced red peppers and onions, cheddar cheese, wheat toast with a couple strips of bacon on the side and a tall glass of cold milk.

And dessert, who doesn't enjoy a great piece of apple pie, with ice cream, all produced by farmers and ranchers across Kansas and this country of ours?

You can't beat good food, prepared right. There's nothing like it.

That's why it's so hard to stomach hearing about the many ways our Kansas and American farmers and ranchers are under siege today. Every year, we expect farmers and ranchers to grow more and more food with less land. And every year they do so.

But the attacks and smear tactics come from all sides. Environmental groups, "animal welfare" activists, everyone seems to have their own agenda, and the media just can't seem to tell the whole story.

That's the reason we in agriculture must tell our story. Consumers are people, and people forget.



**John Schlageck**

• Insights  
Kansas Farm Bureau

They forget our farmers and ranchers make sure we eat the healthiest, most affordable food on the planet. These producers take good care of their livestock, because it's the right thing to do. It is part of farmer's and rancher's values that embody everything they do.

It's also up to us in agriculture to expose the Human Society of the United States and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA, for who and what they are. In case you haven't heard, these two organizations are leading the charge to "step up for animal welfare."

However, this "humane" society has one goal and one goal only — the total elimination of all animal agriculture in this country. Go to their website and check it out. This group wants to remove meat, milk and eggs from the human diet, yours and mine.

Most American consumers have never lived or worked on a farm. Still they retain nostalgic visions of their grandparents or great-grandparents' farms. You know the story where these farmers and ranchers of old grew their own vegetables, milked a few cows, raised

pigs for bacon, ham and pork chops and cared for a couple dozen chickens that laid eggs in an old white wooden coop.

Like a lot of things from the past, nostalgia might appear to be better than it really was. Many of our grandparents were barely able to eke out a living while raising a large family.

The days of yesteryear on the farm took a lot of hard work from sunup to sundown. Many still went hungry or broke, and times were lean.

Today's animal husbandry, or care and feeding of livestock, is no accident. Rather, it's evolved because of the dedicated men, women and children who raise and care for this state's livestock. For generations, Kansas farmers and ranchers have watched over and nurtured cattle, hogs, sheep, chickens and other livestock from sunup to sunset — every day of the year.

The more comfortable these farmers and ranchers make their animals, the more productive they're going to be and the better opportunity they'll have to make a profit.

The health and welfare of livestock trumps everything else on a farm, even a farmer's own comfort. That's been the recipe for success for nearly 150 years, and with any luck, it'll be the same for another 150.

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.

### Write us

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Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

