

## Free Press Viewpoint

# Secretary's road benefitted Kansas

News that Secretary Deb Miller is leaving the Kansas Department of Transportation to work for a private consulting firm does not gladden the heart, because Deb Miller has been good for Kansas.

You could argue that the fact she served three governors over eight years proves she was the right person to lead the agency during a difficult time. Consider especially the fact that those three – Democrats Kathleen Sebelius and Mark Parkinson and Republican Sam Brownback – agreed on almost nothing else.

As secretary of transportation, Ms. Miller has at least two outstanding accomplishments: she shifted the culture of the department from an agency that listened mostly to engineers, to one that tried to listen to people, and she managed the almost impossible when she shepherded a new transportation program through the Legislature in the midst of a recession and massive state budget cutbacks last year.

Ms. Miller did much more than that, of course. She brought a new sense of mission to the department and she brought many ordinary Kansans in to advise the engineers. She lifted the “glass ceiling” for the agency’s women with the appointment of the first woman district engineer, among others. She sent teams out to listen to local public officials about their highways, and made it a point to get to know the movers and shakers across the state.

In our area, after listening to the people, she championed a plan to make low-cost “practical” improvements to rural secondary highways, starting at K-23 south of Grainfield. Paved shoulders replaced steep dropoffs into the ditch. The department stressed citizen involvement. Local officials helped set priorities for improvements.

It’s high time, we’re sure, that she get out in the private sector and make some money. The state cannot pay leaders of her caliber what they are worth, but in a sense, her contributions have been priceless. She always took time to listen to people’s ideas, incorporating the best of them into the department’s planning.

That alone was a seismic shift in an agency where thinking had become ossified after the last great upheaval, when after years of political influence, the engineers were put in charge and the old state Highway Commission put out to pasture.

If that had to happen, then so did the new revolution of meshing people’s desires with sound engineering.

So, hats off to the departing secretary. She has led the department well, with the good of our state always in mind, and leaves a legacy of good roads, improved rail and airport programs, and strong planning for the future. Those plans range from a network of four-lane expressways to carry ever greater traffic to improved rail lines, a major intermodal hub outside of Kansas City, preliminary talks to extend an Amtrak train from Oklahoma to Kansas City and continued strong emphasis on keeping all Kansas highways in top condition.

So long, Madam Secretary. And thanks. – Steve Haynes

## Write us

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters.

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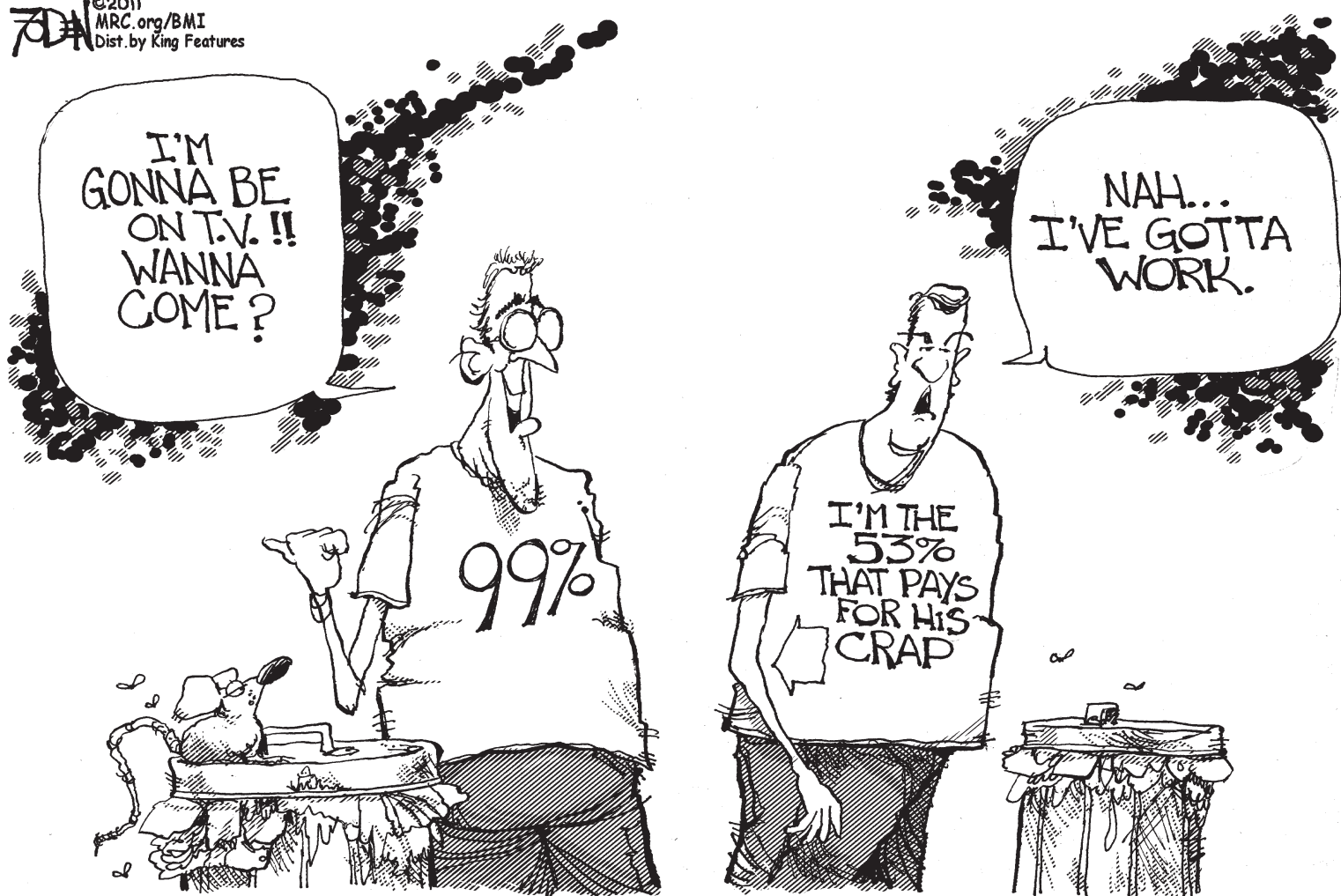
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# Pets keep everyone on their toes

You’d think with the kids gone, things would have gotten less hectic around our house.

Let’s face it, three kids keep you jumping, and I figured that when the kids went off to college and the old dog died, it would get more peaceful around here.

Well, two out of three of our children are married and living in Georgia. The last, our son, graduated from high school in 1999 and never looked back. He lives in Lawrence now and comes home only when threatened.

The old dog – two of them actually – did die, and I vowed no more dogs, gerbils, rabbits, hamsters, lizards or snakes. I also decided that two to three cats was the limit.

So why am I living with four cats and a dog?

Well, the dog belongs to Steve and she lives outside. Unlike the children, he really does feed and take care of her, so I can’t complain too much on that score.

We own two cats – Molly and April Alice.

So why do I get up every morning to four noses sniffing and four tails twitching for breakfast? Well, Jezebel belongs to our youngest daughter, who’s husband is allergic to cats.

Frank is April Alice’s son and belongs to our son. The two boys were living the life of carefree bachelors in Lawrence when our son moved into a new apartment which forbade his companion. So Frank came to live with his mother, Molly and Jezebel.



**Cynthia Haynes**

• Open Season

No house with four cats and a dog is ever totally peaceful. There is always quibbling and jockeying for the best spot in the sun, sofa, chair or lap.

Things got really out of hand last Thursday, however.

I was listening to the last high school football game of the year on the radio in the dining room. Steve was tuned in to the sixth game of the World Series on the television while fixing supper. Three of the cats were milling around the food bowls – they each have one – trying to figure out which one was the best, although they all contained the same stuff.

My sister called and was telling me about how she had stuffed 20 relatives into her two-bedroom home for an alumni weekend when the kids all came home with their kids.

With one ear on the radio and one on my sister’s hilarious recounting of a wild weekend, I noted that the fourth cat, Frank, was at the back door.

Frank is a notorious in-out. If he can get the

human servants to cooperate, he will go in and out the back door 100 times a day.

I was just about to get up to let him in when I noticed movement in his mouth.

I made frantic gestures at Steve, who – involved with a strike out on the television and putting a BLT together on a plate – was oblivious.

Frank continued to maul the animal in his mouth. Steve continued to watch and cook. I was mesmerized by the cat, my sister and the football game.

Finally, I got Steve’s attention and he checked on the cat. The bird was toast and partially eaten by then.

Looking back, I realized several things:

Thankfully, the World Series and high school football are over for another year.

I owe my sister a phone call and an apology.

My husband makes really good BLTs without ever seeming to look at what he’s doing.

And, always check the cat’s mouth before letting him in.

Well, time to feed the cats. Come on Molly, Jez, April Alice and you too, Killer.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor’West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

# You want to be a video game millionaire?

“I want to be a video game programmer and retire a millionaire by age 30.”

Walk the halls of American high schools.

Ask the boys what their career goal is. This is a common reply.

When Jacques Cousteau’s Underwater World series was broadcast, many students wanted to become whale biologists – perhaps ten times the numbers needed – and colleges channeled most into related and more practical careers. Today, the popular CSI series brings even more to college to become “evidence officers” (the real term for this job). Again we divert surplus students into more realistic careers.

But the number of high school boys who dream of becoming video game programmers is astronomical.

Where do they get this idea that you can program video games and retire rich early? No billboards tout video game programming. No televised commercials promote the vocation.

But our boys are aware of three very rich men in the electronic arena: the founders of MicroSoft, Facebook, and Apple. And these heroes (so acknowledged by society) became billionaires – that is billionaire with a “b” – by following their love of electronics and programming. Or so our young generation believes. Their knowledge of the business acumen and luck involved in establishing these three companies is minimal.

Our students’ belief that their idols made a fortune through playing with computers and programming is adequate to sustain their dreams.

In addition, every one of them knows that none of their heroes completed college. So why should they buy into the study-hard-to-go-to-college party line? With a growing number of boys video game addicted, failing to complete homework, decreasing their involve-



**John Richard Schrock**

• Education Frontlines

ment in social and academic activities, physically out-of-shape, and basically dropping out of normal life, they have a ready-made excuse to continue playing video games past midnight every night. Many have convinced themselves their obsession will make them the next hit-tech millionaire.

It is not the fault of these corporate founders that they were successful in making billions. But we allow and even condone our boys’ fantasies. As many grow overweight sitting in front of the screens, we blame the vending machines, limit potatoes in school lunches, and push more electronics into schools.

We buy them the latest gaming computers with ultra-fast video cards for supposedly “educational” purposes; then four years later when its gaming capacity is obsolete, we have to buy another home computer – and the “educational” discs are still sealed in their cellophane wrappers, never uploaded.

School administrators face the problem of dissuading some of these boys from dropping out of school. In 1996, the Kansas Legislature raised the compulsory attendance age to 18. Facing some harsh realities, this was altered two years later allowing students 16 and over to drop out if the parents and student sat through an explanation of the likely loss of earning power, etc.

We show them figures that the higher the degree, the higher the income and lower the unemployment. Our boys yawn. They are con-

vinced that they can parlay their video game skills into mega money. And if they can’t, they can always go back and get a GED (not realizing that GED-holders are mostly equivalent to high school dropouts in earning power and college readiness).

This video game millionaire mythology knows no borders. Worldwide, boys are declining in proportional college attendance. This male dream of becoming a play station millionaire is universal.

Other countries are alarmed and working to dismantle the myth.

America lets our boys stay in their fantasy world.

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.

## Where to write, call

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## Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

