



Free Press Viewpoint

On-line privacy challenged by boss

So, you've just applied for a job at the XYZ Company. During the interview, you are told that, as part of the background check, you are required to give them the passwords to your Facebook and Twitter accounts. Do you?

This is no hypothetical question. Employers around the country are beginning to demand exactly that of existing employees, job applicants and even students. And in the current economy, most are getting away with it.

But just because something isn't illegal doesn't make it moral or ethical. This is just plain wrong. In the same situation, would you give an employer the keys to your house so they could snoop through your drawers and computer? Let them eavesdrop on your personal phone conversations or read your diary?

Most of us would say not only no, but heck no. Looking over your shoulder while you access your own account is no better. Even being asked by an employer to make them a Facebook friend, so someone can monitor your social activities, is no different from being asked to put a microphone in your home.

Some may say that your home is not private, since any number of friends and acquaintances may come and go, but the difference is huge. You invite and control who comes in – it's not arbitrary.

Companies that make such a request of your electronic accounts apparently have no respect for personal privacy or personal freedoms, and are both morally and ethically bankrupt.

Some who have been asked for such access have simply said, "I won't work for a company that would make such a request." But these days, especially if you've been out of work for several months, you may not be able to afford the luxury of refusing.

The problem is significant enough that a bill being considered in the New York legislature – the Social Networking Online Protection Act, or SNOPLA (no, I'm not making that up!) – would make it illegal for employers to require social-account access as a condition of employment or application for a job. And it has teeth – a \$10,000 fine per incident. Maryland passed a similar law earlier this year.

Just because it is not illegal – yet – doesn't make it right, which is why Kansas should be at the forefront of the movement and pass its own bill. Don't wait and be the 49th state.

We have little enough personal privacy these days. Let's try to keep what's left.

– Evan Barnum

Write us

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CORNERSTONE OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Gut feeling says wheat estimates high

Looking at Kansas wheat across the state during the first few days of May, members of the Wheat Quality Council labeled the crop in "pretty good shape."

While the wheat in the western third to half of the state needs a drink, the 100 participants of the council's 55th annual Wheat Tour agreed the crop is two to three weeks ahead of schedule and combines will begin rolling into the fields in May, which is unheard of.

After three days on the road, 63 participants estimated the 2012 wheat crop to yield 403.8 million bushels. This figures out to be roughly 45 bushels per acre on 9.5 million acres planted in Kansas.

The tour began April 30 in Manhattan and traveled west to Colby on the first day. Twenty-two vehicles following six different routes made up the convoy. The second day, the tour headed south and east, ending up in Wichita. The final day moved from Wichita to Kansas City.

Each vehicle made from 12 to 20 stops, and this year's tour tallied visits in 608 fields, said Mark Nelson, Kansas Farm Bureau commodities director.

"We used formulas provided by Kansas Ag Statistics to make our estimates," Nelson says. "While this nearly 404 million bushel estimate seems like a huge crop, we only have to go back to '97-'98 when Kansas farmers harvested 500 million-bushel crops. On the other hand, last year, we harvested a much smaller crop with 276 million bushels because of the extreme drought."

Nelson says that because the wheat crop is so far ahead of schedule and the crop insurance price is high, farmers will carry most of the acres all the way to harvest. Even in the poorer fields, he doesn't foresee much abandonment of wheat acres. He estimated only 3 percent of the total crop will be given up this year.



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

Lincoln County farmer Steve Boor was on the tour for the first time this year. Unlike probably 50 percent of the participants; however, this wasn't Boor's maiden voyage into a wheat field. He recalled driving a Massey Harris Super 26 combine during wheat harvest when he was 10, more than 40 years ago.

The veteran farmer says participating in the tour was one of the most fun things he's done. "I had a blast," Boor says. "To rub shoulders with wheat breeders, importers, exporters, millers, bakers, agronomists and just about anyone else who has a hand in wheat was another worthwhile learning experience."

And while there were 100 participants on the tour, Boor was surprised that only nine wheat farmers made the trip. He noted that often estimates of the crop yield were higher than his.

"I'd look at other people's numbers and shake my head and tell them, 'It ain't going to make that,'" Boor said. "They laughed and told me I was figuring low on purpose to keep the price of wheat high."

Not so, the Lincoln County wheat grower told those on the tour.

"After 40 years of walking in and out of these fields," he said, "I can look at wheat and tell you if it's a 10-, 20-, 30-, 40- or 50-bushel crop. You feel it in your gut. I've been broken hearted by enough of these fields hoping to harvest 50 bushel wheat and it turned out to be 25 or 30 bushel wheat. It has a way of making you humble."

Boor said many of the tour participants grav-

itated to the best-looking wheat in each field. He'd hang back and find a spot that was more representative of the average field. He added that he couldn't blame them for being attracted to the best-looking wheat.

While he admitted the wheat crop did look good in some regions, he noted that he didn't see any heads on this trip like he's seen in past years when there was talk of good, big crops.

"That's another reason I wasn't convinced the figures we came up with were something you could take all the way to the bank," Boor says.

When the Lincoln County farmer returned home after the tour, he looked at the local crop. In just four days, he said, he was amazed at how far the wheat had "backed up."

"I can guarantee you our wheat crop isn't going to make what our estimates on the tour showed," Boor says. "The hot temperatures and wind really took the starch out of the wheat crop."

Like all farmers, Boor knows the crop was as good as it could get the first week in May. At this stage of maturity, with ideal weather conditions, the crop can maintain, but if temperatures turn hot and the wind continues to blow, the crop can deteriorate quickly.

While he wouldn't be surprised if there is some 50- and 60- bushel wheat harvested in Kansas this year, Boor says he'd be thrilled with a crop that averages 40 bushels per acre.

"I'd guess we'll harvest about 390 million bushels in Kansas," the Lincoln County farmer said. "I'm a realist. Whatever it ends up when we haul the crop to the bin, that's what it'll be."

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.

Legislature still has work to do

The Legislature continued its work last week in the Veto Session. We return this week to wrap up the budget and any other key issues that need to be addressed before adjourning.

Time is of the essence when legislators come back to Topeka today and finishing the budget will be a top priority in addition to a few other priorities the Senate laid out at the start of the session.

Balanced Budget. The Senate passed a balanced budget last week that reduces overall spending by \$324 million and calls for a \$457.7 million ending balance. The Senate budget takes into account anticipated cuts from the federal government and it restores some of the money previously cut from state aid to schools.

During the recession, nearly \$18,000 was cut from every Kansas classroom. The Senate budget begins to restore some of those dollars to help reduce larger class sizes, increased fees and teacher layoffs. The House adopted its version of the budget this week, allowing the two chambers to begin negotiating differences in the two. The negotiations will continue before a final budget can be voted on by both.

School Finance. The Senate sent two bills to the House prior to the close of the regular session addressing school finance. The first would put more dollars directly into the class-



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

room by increasing the base state aid per pupil by \$74 over the next two years. This bill was sent to the House Budget Committee at the end of March.

The other bill allowed for school districts to save up to 10 percent of a district's general-fund budget in a contingency reserve. The option to set aside dollars for future operation expenses would help local schools plan for fluctuations in the economy without risking classroom resources, teachers and other essential services. These bills remain in a conference committee, where Senate and House members can negotiate a final plan.

Property Tax Relief. Property tax relief was a priority for the Senate this year. Senators overwhelmingly passed a plan to restore the Local Ad Valorem Tax Fund, sending \$180 million to local governments to reduce property taxes, or \$45 million per year for four years. This was adopted in the Senate's version of the

budget; for each dollar paid to a county, there must be a \$1 reduction in local taxes.

College or Career Ready. This plan would ensure that each Kansas student has the opportunity to prepare for college or a career path by graduation. It also establishes an incentive program that awards school districts \$1,000 for each high school student who graduates with an industry-recognized credential in a high-demand occupation.

Based on the governor's technical education plan, the intent of this bill is to support the preparation of our workforce in shortage areas – such as certified welders, automotive, aircraft and computer support technicians and nursing – and to prepare students to go to work at these skilled, higher-paying jobs after graduation from high school. The House adopted its version of the bill late this week and it will be sent back to the Senate.

Redistricting. The committee met this week and passed out a potential Senate map. The map can be found at bit.ly/Buffalo20.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 225-E, Topeka, Kan., 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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