

from our viewpoint...

Facebook firings not a simple issue

Social media like Facebook, Twitter or MySpace is still a new enough concept that it's going through a lot of growing pains.

The latest to make the headlines are people being fired for what they post. A woman at a health food market in Oregon was fired after posting that she was frustrated at work. She said hadn't used the name of the company or names of anyone in the company and that she had her page set so only her Facebook "friends" could see it.

It isn't a new issue, in fact it's been around since Facebook began in the early 2000s. When the site was founded, it was only for college students, and since college students like to misbehave and sometimes are proud of it, a lot of pictures of illegal behavior were posted online. It was only a matter of time until law enforcement and university officials got wise and started looking at students' Facebook pages. There have been numerous examples over the years, including students getting arrested at the University of Colorado after their faces could be identified in riot photos they had posted online.

Now the trend seems to be moving toward the employer/employee relationship. There have even been stories lately of employers asking job seekers for their Facebook passwords such as a Maryland prison worker who was forced to give up his password in 2010.

There's also software that will automatically monitor employees' Facebook pages. And, lest we forget, the government is also monitoring for keywords to make sure we're not all terrorists.

But is what we post online protected speech? And should we fear getting fired for venting about work on our Facebook pages?

The National Labor Relations Board argues that it falls under the National Labor Relations Act, which gives employees the right to discuss working conditions privately. The board argues that perusing public postings of employees is not unlawful surveillance, but since you can set postings and pictures to become private, that falls under protected speech and employers are not supposed to monitor private communication. Doing so violates employees' rights to "union" activity because it creates a fear of reprisal for voicing an opinion.

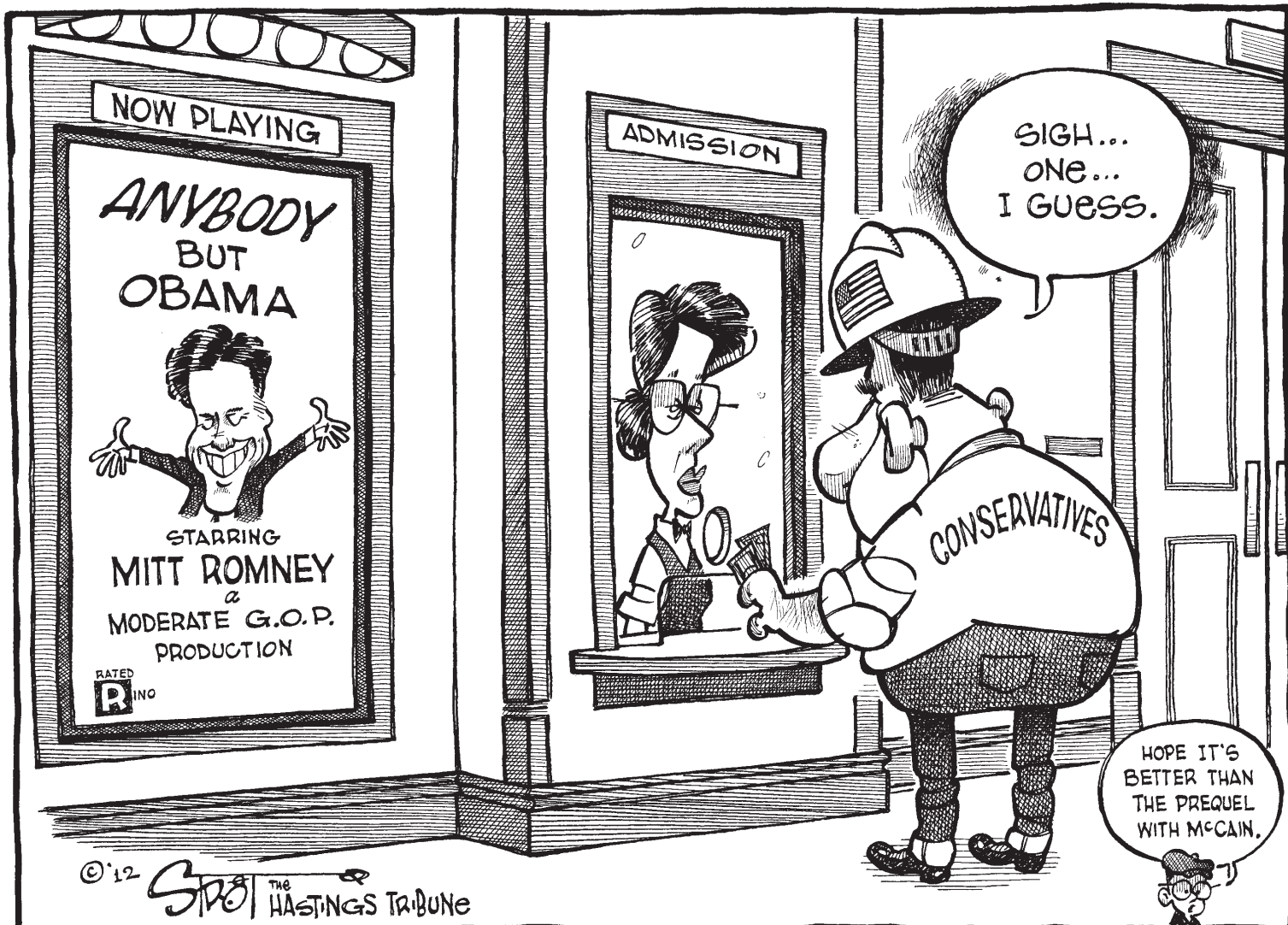
Are there sometimes when its justified? Perhaps. What if an employee posted a picture of themselves or made a post about stealing from the company. What if they made a post about being harassed, but were scared to make a formal complaint to the company.

There are also times when an employee's post can cause real problems for a company or organization. In March of last year, an Israeli soldier posted information about a raid on a West Bank village. Some of his friends, likely also soldiers, reported the posts and the raid had to be cancelled for the safety of the soldiers.

So it isn't a black and white issue. For employers, should you be concerned about damaging or proprietary information getting out via social networking? Yes. Should you fire employees for griping, no. It's something we all do. Some of us do it verbally, some do it online and some do it silently to ourselves. Griping via social media is a lot more public than the other ways, but it should still be protected speech.

For employees, the best policy is still to simply be careful what you post online. The rule of thumb has always been don't post anything you don't want everyone to see, because there is the possibility that anyone, anywhere could see it. Even if you think it's private, it may not be.

Until more employers codify their policies regarding social media posts, it may be best to exercise discretion. —Kevin Bottrell



Teaching life skills to kids pays off later

A couple of things came up recently that got me thinking about teenagers.

The first was a young woman from China. An exchange student at Fort Hays State, she gave a program to our Rotary Club.

During the question-and-answer period, she admitted that she couldn't boil water before she went off to school. She also didn't know how to do her own laundry or clean.

My mind went back to my childhood, where my sister and I learned to cook from our mother and grandmother. Every Saturday, the whole family got into the act and cleaned house. My job was dust mopping the hard floors.

My own children were figuring out the basics of cooking by the time they were 5, and by 6, every one of them had some job around the house — folding clothes, rinsing dishes and emptying the dishwasher. When they were older, they did the laundry and mowed the lawn.

This girl said that her parents felt it was her job to study, but they ended up sending her out into the world with a head full of knowledge and few skills to cope with life.



cynthia haynes

• open season

She's a smart girl and she soon learned the basics of living, but it was a hard lesson for the first few weeks in a strange country.

I remember the bellyaching that went on in our house as our little slaves labored over the dishes and laundry. But when my children left home, they all could cook, clean and do laundry and minor clothing repairs.

The other thing that I overheard was a couple of friends bemoaning the feeling of entitlement of teenagers today.

This is nothing new, my friends.

OK, kids don't so much feel entitled as they're scammers.

They'll talk you out of anything. They whine. All their friends have new outfits, those \$200 tennis shoes, don't have curfew and don't have any chores around the house.

Bull. Their friends are saying the same things to their parents.

My daughters thought it was awful that we didn't buy them new clothes. If they wanted something, they had to save their money and buy it themselves. They had jobs by the time they were 16.

We didn't pay them for the work they did at home. That was the dues they paid for living in the household.

When they turned 16, though, they had the opportunity to buy a car.

Their friends all had fancier vehicles bought by their parents, we were told.

That's nice, we said. Too bad you were born in this family. We don't do things that way.

Today, as adults, our three children know how to handle their money because they've always had to be accountable to themselves for what they spent.

It may be hard to listen to the whimpering from your little kids and the griping as they get older, but stay tough. These are lessons they need to learn, and like all lessons, they just get harder as you get older.

Farm Bill vital to Kansans

During the past three years we have witnessed nearly every single sector of the economy sustain considerable damage. Banking, finance, housing, and manufacturing have been some of the hardest-hit industries. Millions of Americans have been out of work.

But during this time, agriculture has remained one of the brightest spots in the economy, providing tremendous value to both Kansas and the entire nation. Whether it is crop or livestock production or processing these into food, fiber, or fuel, there is much to celebrate in Kansas agriculture, especially our ability to capture growth in export markets like South Korea, Japan or Mexico.

However, prosperity in agriculture, and all of rural America, can be highly cyclical. Commodity and input markets, always highly volatile, have become increasingly so — often in response to world economic conditions, monetary policy at the Federal Reserve, Washington's fiscal policy, or the age-old unknown of weather. The recent onslaught of regulation and red tape has not been kind either.

One additional area that affects agriculture prosperity is the Farm Bill. Last crafted by the



tim huelskamp

• u.s. rep.

House and Senate Agriculture Committees in 2008, this legislation establishes the priorities for programs ranging food stamps, nutrition, and school lunch programs to actual farm programs dealing with crop insurance, commodities, conservation, and credit — among other things.

While it is a large undertaking to write a farm bill, it accounts for less than 2 percent of all federal spending. Within the Farm Bill less than 20 percent out of every dollar actually goes to agricultural programs — the remaining 80 percent is directed toward nutrition welfare programs.

As a fifth-generation farmer, I have personal experiences and knowledge that would inform my decision-making in Farm Bill deliberations, but I would like to ask Kansans to provide their input as well. After all, it is Kansans'

hard-earned dollars that support the Farm Bill and their enterprises that are affected by it.

I am honored to have the opportunity to host an official House Committee on Agriculture Farm Bill field hearing. Please join me for this hearing at 8 a.m. (Mountain Time) Friday, April 20, at the Magouirk Conference Center in Dodge City. Chairman Frank Lucas will be in attendance to hear the testimony of witnesses on two panels. All Kansans are invited to submit their comments for the official record at Agriculture.House.Gov.

After the hearing, Kansans are invited to stay for an Agriculture Town Hall that I will host at the same location. There will be an "open mic" session so that anyone who wants to provide their thoughts, experiences, and priorities will have the opportunity do so.

Kansans have a long and proud tradition of agricultural success, and it is my hope that as many Kansans as possible will share their stories with our office as we engage in writing the next Farm Bill.

Tim Huelskamp of Fowler represents Kansas' First District in the U.S. House of Representatives.

No laptops for Chinese freshmen

Today I write to you from an agricultural university in Western China. Students are back to campus where classes will continue through the month of June.

Chinese university students face the same challenges American students face. In high school they have been watched over. Teachers push them to complete their studies and do well on tests. Then in college, the students find themselves on their own — "free" to fail. Having spent their childhood cramming for the all-important high school leaving exam, they now have the opportunity to "sleep in."

Over nine million students took the college entrance exams last June. Less than six million passed and were admitted. Unlike the U.S., the academic lower 40 percent that failed cannot attend tertiary schools. But those who scored high enough to enter college are at risk of failure if they do not keep up their studies. And in China, a student cannot shop around for majors. They must complete their four-year program with their classmates.

Nor can they exercise their newfound opportunity to "sleep in." Students who abandon their 12 years of work and study ethic will fail. For this reason, some Chinese universities have hired adjuncts to oversee their freshman



education frontlines

• John Schrock

class and serve as coaches and surrogate parents to try to ensure they do not fail. In the U.S., we call this "freshman year experience" and try to provide students with academic activities, perhaps a common floor in the dormitory where the resident assistants watch over first-year students.

In China, this program comes with pressure to get out of bed, help with studies, and plenty of shame if a student doesn't work hard. For many students, there are four grandparents and two parents relying on the student for their future support. The burden of responsibility can be heavy.

But there is one new experimental policy at some universities that I did not expect. Freshmen are prohibited from bringing laptop computers their first year. They have plentiful access to computers on campus. But those computers do not have access to any video games.

Chinese teachers are very aware that many freshmen, especially boys, come to college and soon spend all of their time playing video games. This is an easy policy to enforce in the remote university where I am located because there are not large numbers of computer cafes downtown. This policy would not work in Beijing or Shanghai.

The disastrous effect of video games on boy's academics is a problem that has dramatically decreased the proportion of boys in college worldwide. In the U.S., we continue to be in denial despite observing the many male students flunking out after their first semesters of nonattendance. China cannot lose that much talent and has decided to take action. In the United States, the computer-corporate complex prevails in indoctrinating us that all of our electronics can do no wrong. Some state universities, pressed by state defunding to attract as many warm bodies as possible, become laptop or tablet universities in an effort to appear techie, and ignore the academic implications.

The research on computer addiction is clear. China "gets it." But in the U.S., we just do not seem to care.

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