

GUEST VIEWS

Delta's smart to ban phony support animals

Dogs, cats, turkeys, pigs, rabbits, hamsters, marmots, even iguanas? No, you haven't wandered into a zoo or a pet shop. This is an airline cabin, and those aren't pets; they're emotional support animals. If you have the bad luck to be seated next to someone with one, well, be grateful that snakes and ferrets aren't allowed.

Anyone who ventures into a U.S. airport these days likely will see a passenger carrying a small furry creature wearing a special vest or tag identifying its distinctive function. Some of these are actual service animals, defined by the ADA National Network as "individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability."

Many, though, fall into a looser category of animals that are supposedly helpful to travelers who don't have blindness or PTSD but may feel less anxious with a nonhuman companion. The federal Air Carrier Access Act has been interpreted to require airlines to accommodate passengers who need—or claim to need—an animal for emotional support. The main thing it takes to qualify on most airlines is a letter from a physician or therapist.

This policy has spawned a host of websites offering quick, easy certification. One offers 24-hour service, including a five-minute questionnaire and chat with a licensed therapist. Says the site, "Getting an ESA Qualification Has Never Been Easier."

Another highlights one big attraction: "Pets fly in cabin free." Oh, we forgot to mention: If you want to take your pet cat aboard, you can expect to pay \$125, but if you want to take your emotional support animal, you can expect to pay nothing.

The dual policy is an invitation to people willing to scam the system without regard for their cabin mates. One example, located by ABC News, is a young woman named Genevieve who said she wanted to take her dog Kali with her when she flew, so "she lied about having an emotional illness so that Kali could become an emotional support animal."

What's wrong with such fibbing? One problem is that it rewards dishonest fliers and penalizes honest ones. Another is that it exposes passengers to pets that—unlike actual service animals—may not be trained for such conditions. One 70-pound dog bit another passenger in the face on a flight from Atlanta to San Diego last year. Delta Air Lines says it has experienced an 84 percent increase in "animal incidents," including urination, defecation and biting, since 2016.

The airline now transports 700 service and support animals each day. So it has decided to take action to discourage illegitimate use of the emotional support option.

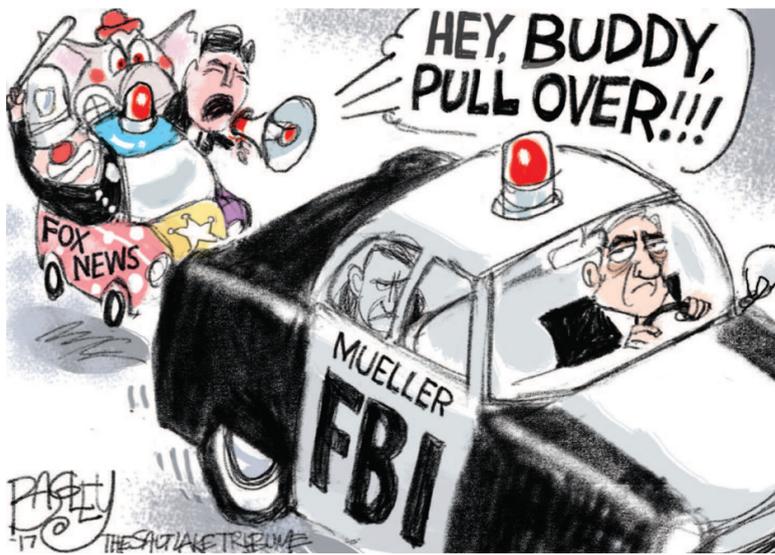
As of March 1, each owner will have to provide veterinary health and vaccination records, a letter documenting the traveler's need and a signed "confirmation of training form" at least 48 hours before takeoff.

It's a sensible step, and one other airlines should consider in the interests of the many passengers who don't evade rules, lie and put others at risk to save money. The change will work to the benefit of those travelers with real conditions that warrant accommodation of their support animals.

Remember Genevieve, who faked her emotional illness? She confessed that she had a friend "tell me that people were having adverse consequences from this. Legitimate people with legitimate animals were getting confronted." She realized she was in the wrong and stopped taking her dog. Maybe Delta's new policy will move other passengers to follow her example.

—Chicago Tribune

OTHER VIEWS



Trump, his toadies don tinfoil hats

A wild animal is most dangerous when it's cornered. We're seeing that now.

Putin chump Donald Trump, aided by obsequious fright-wing Republicans and amplified by servile TV talking heads, is feeling the heat from Robert Mueller. With each indication that the Russia probe is inching ever closer to his throne, he's lashing out ever more crazily—conjuring paranoid notions of secret conspirators plotting his downfall.

For proof, check out the Fox News alert ("Secret Society to Resist Trump"), the Sean Hannity tweet ("Anti-Trump SECRET SOCIETY at DOJ"), the Rush Limbaugh bloviation ("not surprised that there's a secret society"), and some of the remarks on Capitol Hill, although they seem a bit wobbly. Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson hinted this week that an "informant" has outed the "secret society," but he later walked back his statement. Texas Rep. John Ratcliffe said "there may have been a secret society" but added, "I'm not saying that actually happened."

They're doubling down on the crazy precisely because Mueller is turning up the high heat.

The special counsel has reportedly talked to Jeff Sessions and James Comey, and now he wants Trump under oath. He may be zeroing in on an obstruction of justice charge. He's also probing Trump's finances, including possible money-laundering entanglements with Russian figures, and Rick Gates, an ex-Trump staffer recently indicted on money-laundering charges, is now reportedly signaling that he might be willing to cooperate. This ain't Atlantic City, where Trump could stiff contractors and get away with it. This is the big leagues.

And this is a very dangerous phase we are entering. To save himself, Trump is clearly willing to slime the credibility of our law enforcement agencies. To help him, most Republicans are clearly willing to re-brand themselves as the party of paranoia. And Putin is surely pleased, because this way he's infecting our democracy without firing a shot.

I refuse to explain in detail the genesis of the "secret society" meme. If you want detail, go to the tinfoil media. The basic gist is the phrase surfaced—without context—in a text exchange between FBI agent Peter Strzok and FBI lawyer



DICK POLMAN

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Lisa Page. The lovers swapped tens of thousands of texts in 2016 and 2017, and at times they dumped on Trump. (They also, at various times, dumped on Democrats, including Obama attorney general Eric Holder).

But Sean Hannity thinks these texts are "like Watergate, but far worse... It reeks of conspiracy." And his client, Trump, has been very excited about the texts—especially because, as it turns out, an unknown number of texts, exchanged between December 2016 and May 2017, are missing.

Unfortunately for Hannity and Trump, it turns out the texts were erased in a widespread technical screwup at the Department of Justice that affected nearly 10 percent of the FBI's 35,000 employees. Care to guess who broke that story? A reporter on the website of Fox News.

As for Trump, he said on Wednesday that he'd "love" to take questions from Mueller. He'd "love to do it as soon as possible," under oath. But that remark has the value of a three-dollar bill, and, sure enough, his lawyers scrambled to hose down the whole idea, insisting that Trump had spoken hurriedly and that no arrangements have been made. Their qualms are understandable, because they know darn well that Trump is a font of lies and thus risks exposure for perjury.

All the more reason to protect Trump by pumping up the propaganda. Hence this broadside, posted Wednesday: "From 'secret societies' to flawed FBI probes, the Russiagate narrative is imploding. The anti-Russia narrative is collapsing under the growing weight of evidence pointing to a concerted internal effort on the part of the U.S. establishment to sabotage the Trump presidency."

Oh wait! That was posted by the Russians, on their RT network website.

Which prompts me to wonder: With Mueller's sleuths closing in, are the Russians writing for the Republicans—or is it the other way around?

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YOUR VIEWS

We need to start thinking 'vertically' about politics

Most of us have trouble connecting politically with family, friends and co-workers. We don't understand their different views or how they got them.

The book "Blue Jeans in High Places" by Mike McCabe has been very helpful for me. One solution, Mike writes, is to think vertically rather than horizontally. Don't worry who is more liberal or conservative on a spectrum. Don't worry who is more left or right wing. Rather,

we should think about the very few powerful people or groups at the top pulling the political strings.

The powerful must like it when us "commoners" squabble and think horizontally. It is easier to unite when we think vertically. We can then defeat big money from the few in elections. We can get along better with our neighbor.

I'm supporting McCabe for governor. He has been a fighter for democracy throughout his career. Now is the time for Mike.

ED JEANNETTE
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Hunting, fishing opportunities expand this year

By Rick May

The alarm clock sounds—it is 4:30 a.m. on a Saturday. After packing lunches and loading up the car, the kids are excited to get on the road. By 5:30, the family is driving up Highway 26 on its way to the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge. Hunting season is here.

For many Wisconsin families, this will be a reality come the fall of 2018. Hunting, along with fishing, snowmobiling, and other forms of outdoor recreation, is a key part of the American heritage. At the Department of the Interior, we spent last year focused on expanding public access to public land for all Americans, especially young Americans, so we can build a generation of advocates for conservation and land stewardship. Sportsmen and women are the greatest conservationists because they have spent countless hours enjoying the land on which they recreate.

In 2017, Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke expanded hunting and fishing opportunities at 10 of our national wildlife refuges. Two of them, Horicon and Fox River National Wildlife Refuges, are right here in Wisconsin. At Horicon, we expanded migratory game bird, upland game, and big game hunting, as well as sport fishing. Fox River now boasts 80 newly acquired acres open for big game hunting of white-tailed deer.

This fierce push for public access is nothing new for Ryan Zinke. Eight years ago, I stopped in Whitefish, Montana, to catch up with the secretary, then just an old friend of mine, while I was riding from Banff, Canada, to Mexico on the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route. From our time together in the Navy SEALs, I knew the secretary was an outdoorsman who loved to hunt and fish, but on this occasion, I saw a different side.

When I arrived in Whitefish, he invited me to paddle the Flathead River with him. Rowing along in our paddleboat and talking about the splendor and beauty of the river, we passed the remains of a covered wagon, 20 feet under the water. One of the wheels was almost fully intact, and I marveled at this incredible relic of generations past. I began to ask questions about the region's history, and Secretary Zinke stopped the boat to explain, in great detail, the pioneering back story of the place where he grew up, relating it all back to this sunken wagon.

His passion about our land—its history, its wildlife and its wonder—was evident. He values outdoor recreation and public use of the land so deeply because they are cornerstones of the very American heritage he so reveres.

It's no surprise that he is now secretary of the Interior—America's principal steward of our public land, charged with protecting our natural treasures. As senior adviser to the secretary for recreation, I came to Washington, D.C., to help the secretary carry out his pro-access agenda because I believe, like he believes, that our lands are "for the benefit and enjoyment of the people," as the words on the Roosevelt Arch in Yellowstone National Park proclaim.

Under Secretary Zinke, hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation are back atop the priority list. As Wisconsin families look forward to enjoying the great outdoors this year, we will build on our work in the outdoor recreation space in 2018.

Retired U.S. Navy SEAL Capt. Rick May is a senior advisor to Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke for recreation.



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
A frog sits on a leaf at the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge.

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