

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



What happened to the trust?

From The Manhattan Mercury
When it became known in December that the National Security Agency was, without warrants, eavesdropping on phone calls involving overseas connections, Americans had reason to wonder what else the NSA was up to.

The answer, or part of it, came when USA Today reported that the NSA has been keeping track of millions of Americans' phone records. That the NSA says it hasn't been listening in doesn't begin to justify the indiscriminate intrusion into Americans' privacy.

Neither do the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, though President Bush seems to think they have given him unlimited powers. This tracking — this collection of a vast database that could involve a trillion phone calls since 2001 — has been done without either the knowledge of the American people or anything approaching Congressional authorization.

This data-mining has been done with the cooperation of three of America's telecommunication giants — ATT, Verizon and BellSouth. To its credit, Qwest Communications, which questioned the legality of the activity, had the courage to refuse to cooperate with this clandestine surveillance.

The NSA is keeping a record of the numbers Americans dial in an attempt to detect patterns that might help intelligence analysts turn up a threat to U.S. security. As for the claim that the NSA is only tracking numbers, one needn't be an intelligence expert to collect all kinds of personal information from phone records.

The least that Congress should do is craft legislation that clearly delineates the National Security Agency's authority — what it can do on its own and what it cannot do without judicial authorization or congressional approval.

As was the case with the revelation about warrantless eavesdropping, it's hard not to wonder what else citizens don't know that is worth knowing. Will Americans learn that the NSA is listening in to ordinary citizens' phone calls because the administration believes it has the right. Or will Americans perhaps find out that not only is their government compiling records of their phone calls, it's also tracking their online activity?

Citizens might also wonder why they're expected to trust the government when it demonstrates so little trust in them.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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An important ride to take

Sunday marks an annual event which is near and dear to my heart.

It is the day some 500 plus motorcyclists will pass through Colby and Oakley as they make their way from the California to Washington, D.C. for the Memorial Day Sunday ride called Rolling Thunder Ride for Freedom.

This, the 19th annual trek, will be made by two of my dearest friends, Joe "Dragon" and MeeOk Lozano.

Joe was one of the originators of the ride which honors military men and women who have died or are missing in action while protecting the United States.

Both Joe and MeeOk were stationed in Germany during the timeframe I lived there with my children and their dad (1979 to 1982) and both of them spent more than 25 years in the United States Army and protecting each and every one of us.

Having left Ontario, Calif., Tuesday, cyclists join the ride they call the Run for the Wall which will culminate with them being about 500,000 strong as they ride from the Pentagon to the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, also known as The Wall.

Men, women and children, and a few pets in



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

tow, will leave Limon, Colo., on Sunday morning and roar through Colby and stop for gas and their noon meal in Oakley.

If you have never heard the hum of several hundred motorcycles, including the well known low tone of the Harley Davidson which is keen to many vets, I encourage you to hang out at one of Interstate 70 overpasses between 11 a.m. and noon Sunday.

If you happen to take along a youngster, please make sure they know that those riding in the group have been or currently support our nation's right to bear arms and protect ourselves, whether privately or publicly through one of the military branches.

Anyone who has spent any amount of time with someone involved with the Run for the Wall will soon learn the group's mission statement,

philosophy and goals.

Their mission statement is to promote healing among all veterans and their families and friends, to call for an accounting of all Prisoners of War and those Missing in Action (POW/MIA), and to honor the memory of those Killed in Action (KIA) from all wars.

Their philosophy is they strive to maintain a safe, supportive and private atmosphere in which all participants can reflect and heal on their journey to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. in the hope that they can return home to a new beginning.

Their goals are to guide the participants safely across America; educate future generations as to the importance of accountability in wartime actions emphasizing that no one should be left behind; and participate in Rolling Thunder in support of their demand for government accountability for POW/MIAs.

If you do happen to take the time to go out and watch the riders, you might consider taking a flag to wave above them and please don't forget to offer a salute as they go by. They'll deeply appreciate your respect and honor.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.

Don't trust the media

A free press is part of the system of checks our Founders put on this experiment in self-government, therefore the integrity of the fourth estate is one of the foundations of our society.

It is perhaps even more important for the press to be competent than unbiased. For one thing, the only people who are truly unbiased are so open-minded their brains have fallen out.

Competent people, on the other hand, are usually reasonably intelligent, meaning that we can trust their research if not their conclusions, which leads to the point about trusting the media.

Our Founding Fathers, in general, were not very trusting of government. In fact, they even put checks on the power of the majority, some of which we have removed to our peril in my view.

Many of them defined good government as interfering as little as possible.

Unfortunately, a free and unrestricted press requires an educated and active public to keep an eye on it. While we still have the best education system in the world and access to information that would stagger the founders, we do not take advantage of our blessings.

We are generally neither discerning nor particularly attentive in our news gathering activities. For one thing, we get our news from television, which has a couple of strikes against it.

First, television is ratings driven. Yes, all news



Jay Kelley

• Speaking MyMind

is profit oriented, but television is the worst. All of the major networks pander to our basest fears. How many times have you heard the tag for a "special report" asking if your child (parent, dog, car, etc.) was safe?

Radio isn't much better, but it is a source for quick updates during the day and some news shows provide a little perspective.

The print media, however, can't play on our visual and auditory senses. Oh, there are pictures, which are become more prevalent as our society becomes less willing to use the literacy with which we have been blessed, but even then, it is harder to spin a picture without mood music and voice inflection.

The printed page has the added advantage of longer deadlines, meaning more time to develop a story and check resources.

With all that, there are still precautions we should take if we are going to be the informed and educated populace of Jefferson's ambition.

First, we must look for the bias. It is there and

much of it is liberal, but it is not particularly political. Mostly, it is the fuzzy thinking which makes value judgments based on subjective reasoning, such as friendships or certain pet ideas.

Second, we must look for the ignorance. No one can know everything about every subject, but reporters are called to inform us about a variety of subjects and many times ignorance gets in the way. By the way, when the pundits at the local doughnut shop give you the "real" story, you can bet it isn't any more accurate and not nearly as well researched as what was in the paper.

A good reporter seeks to remove these traits from the story. He or she learns to reason objectively and ask corresponding questions to get the facts. Good reporters anticipate the readers' questions and ask them ahead of time.

Good readers do the same. They read, consider and put the questions to those on whom the press reports. They are not inactive, nor do they go off on an editorial tirade before they know the facts.

If, however, they cannot get straight answers from the powers that be, they don't just sit around and complain, they solve the problem on the editorial page and at the polls.

That's the way a free press in a republic works.

Jay Kelley is a local minister and writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@st-tel.net.

About those letters . . .

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Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

