

## Free Press Viewpoint

### Do federal stings cross criminal line?

A federal judge in Chicago has questioned the practice of federal agents who invent a crime, then recruit and arrest willing "helpers" to carry it out, saying the government may be singling out racial minorities for prosecution.

Judge Ruben Castillo noted that at least half the defendants from recent "stash house" operations in that area were black or hispanic. That in itself might not be evidence of racial profiling, but it begs the larger question of whether the government ought to be promoting crime this way.

Nationwide, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, known as ATF, says it has locked up more than 1,000 bad guys in the last 10 years using this technique. Most of them probably deserve to be in jail for something, but still, the idea of government agents inventing a crime and then hiring the criminals gives many people the creeps.

Defense attorneys argue that their peaceful clients would never have engaged in armed robbery without the urging of federal agents. Some federal prosecutors refuse to allow the operations in their districts. These stings barely skirt the definition of entrapment, if that.

And while the agency says it's aiming at some of the most dangerous, violent criminals in the nation, the truth is, as with much of federal law enforcement, the henchmen who show up often are fairly small fish.

Perhaps the government is doing everyone a favor by getting these guys off the streets, but it seems to us that there ought to be a better way to catch crooks than by cooking up phony crimes. Sting operations are always a little suspect.

We'd prefer to see these agents focusing on crimes invented by the criminal, where the intent to break the law is clear from the start. The wife who wants her husband dead and agrees to hire a federal agent posing as a hit man, the burglar who sells his booty to an agent posing as a fence, the drug dealer who sells to an undercover cop, all know what they are doing is wrong.

So, perhaps, does the would-be robber who signs on for a job knocking off a fake "stash house" sheltering imaginary millions in illegal drugs. But would he have committed a similar crime without the government's enticing offer?

Surely, federal agents can spend their time dealing with people who commit real crimes.

— Steve Haynes

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963  
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

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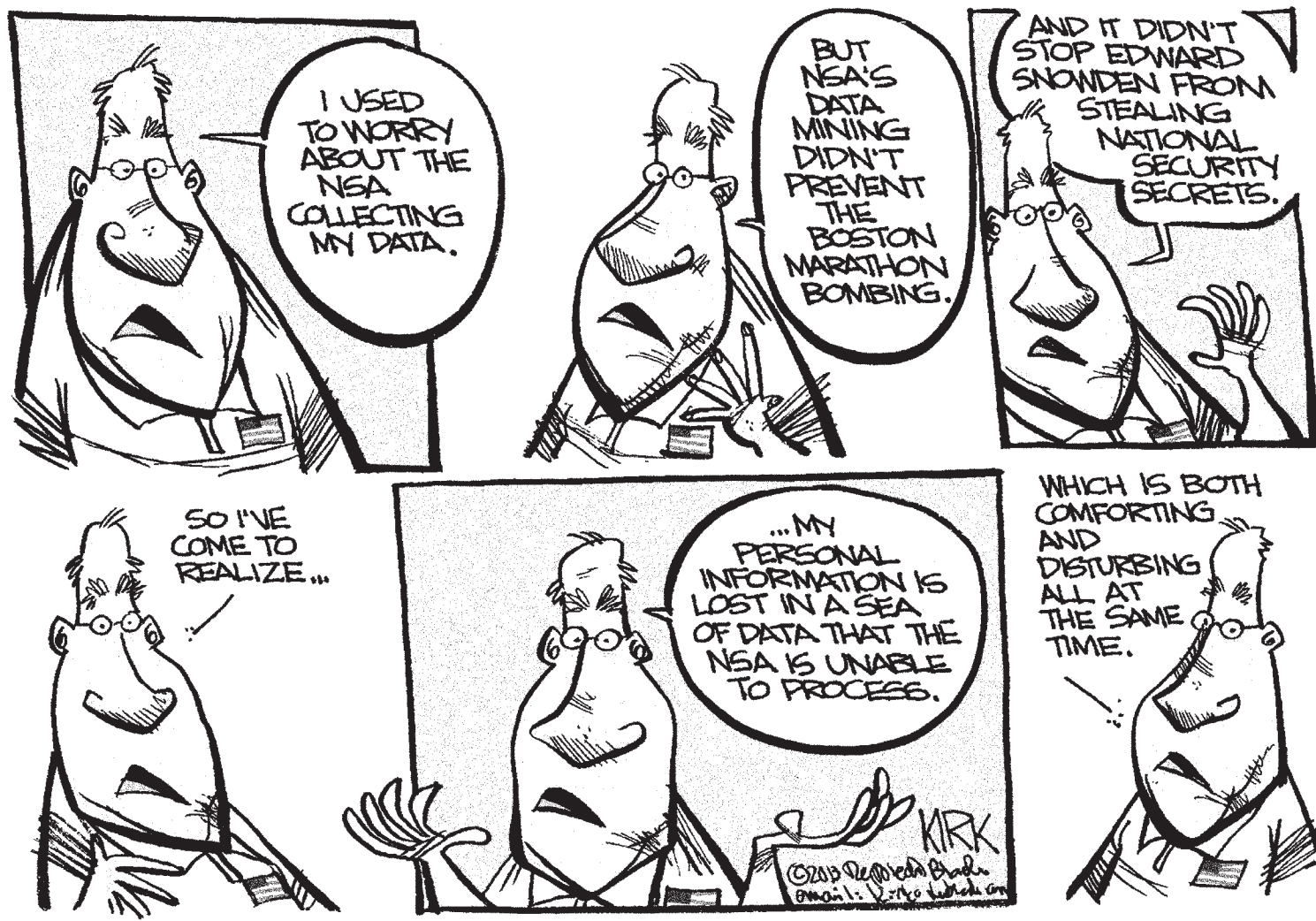
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan., 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72.



### Mary honored by Islam in Turkey

"The most revered woman in Islam," our Turkish guide said, "is the Virgin Mary."

Come again?

I must not have heard him right. But then, we were on our way to a hilltop shrine that is reputed to be the final home of the Blessed Virgin.

According to the Bible, Jesus, at his crucifixion, gave the Apostle John charge of his mother. While that may sound a little odd to us, it was reasonable in a time when a widow with no children faced a bleak future.

According to legend, St. John and Mary lived in Jerusalem for a time until persecution of Christians, especially the beheading of John's brother St. James, led him to relocate both himself and Mary to Ephesus, in southwestern Turkey. Again according to legend, this is where she died.

The small stone house where she supposedly lived has been restored and rebuilt since its discovery in 1891. It has been visited by pilgrims from around the world, including popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

At the shrine, we saw tourists from more than a dozen countries, ranging from Roman Catholic nuns in full habit to Islamic women with covered heads.

Jesus, after all, is a revered prophet in Islam,



**Cynthia Haynes**

• Open Season

part of a line stretching back to Abraham and ending with Mohammed. He is not considered by Muslims to be divine or the Son of God, but he is believed to be a great prophet and his mother is referred to as the Virgin Mary everywhere we went.

The Emperor Constantine replaced paganism with Christianity in the eastern Roman Empire in 313 A.D., and the religion flourished in Turkey and all of Asia Minor. Churches were built and frescos put up showing pictures of Jesus, Mary and the saints.

Centuries later, Muslims conquered the land, and many churches were turned into mosques. The frescos remained. Beautiful pictures from early Christianity painted on ceilings and walls were left as altars disappeared and the followers of Mohammed took over the land.

While our guides were quick to point out that the Ottoman Empire allowed the practice

of all religions and that Jews, Christians and Moslems are all "People of the Book," the population was and still is mostly Islamic.

We saw Orthodox churches and Jewish synagogues in the larger cities. They're a little hard to find, but then, so are mosques in Kansas.

Many of the old churches have been turned into museums today and the Arabic symbols for Allah hang alongside frescos of Mary holding the Christ child. Another church in Istanbul, site of Constantine's old capitol, had in the sanctuary a fresco of "The Death of the Virgin Mary," showing the Holy Mother lying in state in a courtyard.

You can only wonder if the old legends are true. Did Mary live in Ephesus? Is that where she died? The crowds – Muslim and Christian – visiting the little house, washing in the fountain there and leaving prayer tokens, seem to think so.

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

### Why is governor so successful?

With their approval ratings in the mid and low thirties respectively, Gov. Sam Brownback and Secretary of State Kris Kobach are two of the least popular politicians in Kansas. So why have they been so successful in getting their agendas through the Kansas Legislature?

On a recent Saturday afternoon, 25 or so area residents gathered at a downtown Salina restaurant looking for an answer to this question.

The presenter was Louis Goseland, director of organizing for the Sunflower Community Action Group. His principal focus was the American Legislative Exchange Council, one of the many libertarian-leaning groups bankrolled by Wichita billionaire brothers David and Charles Koch. The group's membership is known to include prominent members in leadership positions in our Legislature, as well as at least two from the Salina-area legislative delegation.

Mr. Goseland started out his presentation with photos of the Koch brothers and then proceeded to list the many front groups that they bankroll with innocuous-sounding names such as the Kansas Policy Institute, the Heartland Institute, the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, Americans for Prosperity, and so on. All of these groups receive Koch money and direction.

He then focused in on the Legislative Exchange Council, a group of state legislators



**Alan Jilka**

• A Voice of Reason

dedicated to conservative causes founded nearly 40 years ago by political activist Paul Weyric. Weyric was an early champion of voter suppression laws long before anyone had heard of Kris Kobach. You can watch an old video clip of Weyric on YouTube expounding on how "our (conservative) leverage in elections goes up as turnout goes down."

The council's profile has been elevated in recent years because the Koch brothers and other like-minded libertarians and corporate interests perceive state legislatures as a path of least resistance in terms of implementing their legislative agendas.

What is their agenda? It starts with a shifting of the tax burden from the wealthy to the middle and lower classes and proceeds through a laundry list of libertarian causes – defunding public education, voter suppression, anti-immigrant laws, extreme gun laws, the privatization of public services, weakened environmental laws and efforts to strip teachers and workers of bargaining rights. Hundreds of

pieces of "model" legislation have emerged from this group, much of which has been introduced verbatim in state legislatures across the country.

Prior to the last election, there were at least 46 members of the council in the Kansas Legislature. The wrap-up session of this year's Legislature was reportedly delayed a week so that a large group of members could attend the group's convention in Oklahoma. Those returning from the meeting tried, among other things, to push through a council proposal to suspend implementation of federal Common Core standards for public education, a push that almost succeeded.

The council enjoys federal 501(c) 3 tax status as a charitable organization. Groups with such a designation are required to refrain from political activity. Clearly, our tax laws have loopholes that the Koch brothers want to maintain.

The push to improve our democratic process will involve similar efforts to put the spotlight on groups such as this. More transparency is required so that citizens know what and who they are really voting for when they enter the booth.

Alan Jilka is a former Salina city commissioner and mayor. He was the Democratic nominee for Congress in the 1st District in 2010.

### Where to write, call

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**U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

**State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 136-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov

### Mallard Fillmore

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