

from our viewpoint...

America drifting toward police state?

The following editorial, which originally ran in The Goodland Star-News on April 29, 2011, won first place for editorial writing in the National Newspaper Association Better Newspapers Contest. It was written by Editor Steve Haynes

Bit by bit, America drifts and slides toward becoming a high-tech police state.

Bit by bit, freedoms slip away.

And it always sounds like a good idea.

There is no enemy on the left – or on the right. The threat comes from the bureaucracy, the security apparatus, from authoritarian thinkers on either side of the aisle.

Think this is silly?

Then why are all the supposedly conservative Republicans in Topeka patting themselves on the back for passing a law forcing all Kansans to show a photo ID card before they can vote? Election fraud's never been a problem here.

What's next?

Roving checkpoints where police ask for our citizenship papers, as in some third-rate communist dictatorship from the Cold War era?

Oh, we call those drunk-driver check points. Hunting license checkpoints. Drug interdiction lanes.

If you're stopped for some traffic infraction, notice that the officer is likely to chat you up. He may ask you where you've been or where you're going. If your answer is a little hesitant, he might ask if you'd mind him searching the car.

It's loads of fun, having your car unpacked and dismantled while you sit beside the road.

The other day, Homeland Security agents swept in and took over the train depot in Savannah, Ga. They stopped and searched anyone who entered, whether they intended to board a train or not.

Who knows if the Transportation Security Administration even has that kind of authority. But rail security sounds like a good idea.

Government computers track your movements, your bank accounts, much of your life. And the government can access private computers – at the phone company or the bank or the credit-card company or airlines – and track the rest of your ways.

All of this is done, of course, for the best of reasons. For our own good.

Isn't election security "vital to democracy?" How did we ever get by without it for two centuries. Still, it sound like "a good idea." Same for "enhanced" border security, with computers tracking not only the comings and goings of foreigners, but of Americans as well.

Your bank is under orders to track your finances, especially any cash you might come across, and report you if you exceed certain limits. You might be a criminal, a drug dealer or a tax evader, after all.

And we all want them caught, right?

But when does "enhanced" security begin to impinge on our rights, especially the right to privacy? When is enough security way too much?

Will we wake up one morning and find out that, instead of the government serving us, with all those computers, cameras, records and files, that we must serve the government?

No, the time to defend liberty, as always, is today. Each policy, from the grossly misnamed "Patriot Act," to the latest "voter security" laws, needs to be questioned.

The best level of government involvement in our lives is the least possible. We need to avoid the point where ever-tighter security of all kinds becomes a straightjacket for America.

Ask questions today, not tomorrow. – Steve Haynes



... and Kansas' Cow Feeding costs jumped over the Moon...

Overloaded with good produce

Peaches, watermelon, honeydew, cantaloupe, tomatoes and bing cherries, plus onions, zucchini, yellow squash, sweet corn and green beans – between our garden, a roadside fruit stand and a 4-H sale, we had more produce than we knew what to do.

It was vacation time. Time to go for a nice, relaxing 10 days in Colorado. So I asked a friend to come by and check the garden while we were gone. Then I picked all the squash, beans and tomatoes that were anywhere near ready to go.

As we were ready to leave town, I got the call that the half case of peaches I had ordered several months ago from a 4-H'er had arrived. We took those with us, along with some cherries we had been eating on and hadn't finished.

At Rocky Ford we passed – or rather didn't pass – a fruit stand, and loaded up on more fresh Colorado produce. The car was beginning to look and smell like a vegetable cart, and I expected us to get fruit flies any time.

We ate fresh every day, but there are only two of us. Despite having melon for breakfast, peaches for lunch and stir fry for dinner most days, we still had some leftovers.

I grated the rest of the squash and zucchini and packed it in freezer bags – two cups of squash to a bag. That handles most recipes requiring shredded zucchini, including zucchini



cynthia haynes

• open season

bread and zucchini brownies.

The leftover sweet corn got chopped off the cob and frozen. It will go good in soups and cornbread later in the year.

The few leftover tomatoes went to the neighbors. Out there, the growing season is too short to grow tomatoes, and they always enjoy the fruits of our garden in the fall.

Then there were the peaches, watermelon and a cantaloupe. The watermelon would just go back home with us. I cut up the last cantaloupe to eat on the way.

The peaches were a problem. We had eaten a bunch of them with sandwiches on picnic walks and in the mornings over shortcake, but there were still about a dozen of the smaller, less pretty ones left.

I rummaged around and found a recipe for peach bread in an old cookbook put out by the American Cancer Society in 1981, "The High Country Cookbook." To spice things up, I added a little ginger and cloves to the original recipe.

It was delicious and used up seven of our leftover peaches. The rest I cut up to go with the cantaloupe on the trip home. Here is the recipe:

Peach Bread

- 1 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup shortening
- 2 cups mashed fresh peaches
- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. each ginger and cloves (optional)
- Pinch of salt
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts.

Cream sugar, eggs and shortening. Add peaches and mix. Add dry ingredients and mix lightly. Add vanilla and nuts. Pour into two greased and floured loaf pans and bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes.

Now, that's a good way to use leftover produce, and I'm ready for the 4-H sale next year. I may get a whole case of peaches.

I just wonder if that cookbook has a watermelon recipe I can use.

Don't assume everyone is online

This fall, some Kansas schools required parents to enroll their students online. They assume that virtually all households have access to the internet. If not, well they can always go to the public library or enroll at computers at the school.

School administrators should know better.

Just as the former Kansas tax chief was wrong when she wanted to force everyone to pay taxes online or pay an extra fee, schools are also wrong to require that school enrollment be done online. Paying taxes is not optional. And providing an education for your child is likewise enforced by truancy laws.

Anyone who assumes that the population that they serve is both internet connected and internet literate needs to get out more. While a few affluent Kansas communities may approach universal internet, rural regions may have less than half of their population "wired."

U.S. government data show that six percent of Americans live outside of broadband access. These rural folks can't get internet even if they want it.

But even where it is available, the cost of being online at home is high. A family must not only re-invest every 4-5 years in an up-to-date computer but pay monthly connection fees that can approach or exceed a thousand dollars a year!

In 2006, the percent of households who were connected nationally had increased to nearly three-fourths. Then came the 2008 Great Recession. Staying connected was to expensive for many families who lost jobs or could not make house payments.

According to the last Pew Internet and American Life Project Survey, only 60 percent of American households have broadband access. That means that four out of ten children cannot be enrolled online at home.

And "go to the library" or "use the school computer" is an empty option for parents who are not computer literate. And even the computer savvy can have difficulty navigating the school online enrollment forms.

Counselors and teacher advisors have a responsibility helping students navigate the curriculum and select courses that are correct for their past performance and future goals. Sadly, that is being abandoned as they focus on



education frontlines

• John Schrock

assessment tests. Schools that do not take their student advising responsibilities seriously are not serving their students.

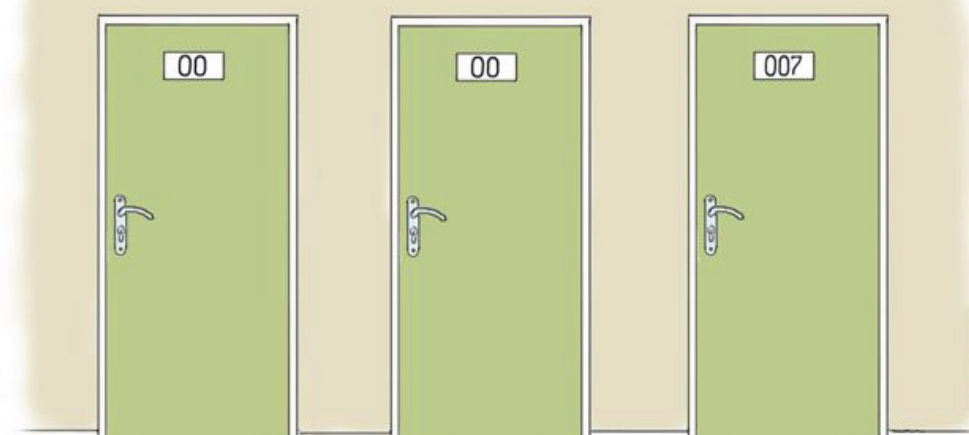
But this overestimation of computer access continues throughout the school year. More schools are shifting homework online. Economically poor, minority and rural students who are more likely to not have internet at home face a new form of discrimination. Half-hearted provision of computer access for a few hours after school does not begin to compensate.

The cost of rapidly-obsolete technology runs over 10 times the medium it replaces and flies against any save-a-tree rationale. Materials printed on home computers by inkjets and laserjets 30 times (by each student in a class)

are vastly more expensive than 30 photocopies run once by a teacher, not to mention the student time wasted. And the vaunted "paperless schools" of Kansas have not only shifted these expenses to homes, but encumber huge costs are they move up each year to the newest I-Pads and equivalent devices.

Many teachers, paras and aides (whose salaries have lost purchasing power since 1971) cannot afford the thousand-dollars-a-year cost of being internet-connected. Yet more schools are requiring these employees receive their school communications online and even be available to students. If "having home internet" was not written into their job description when the position was advertised (and it is questionable if this would be legitimate), some schools are treading on thin ice.

It is time for some schools to "get real" and understand that nationally four out of 10 of their students are not connected to the internet. And these students, and unconnected school employees, are not second-class citizens.



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