

Your government is spying on all of us

Every time you write a check or make a bank deposit, your government may be snooping on you. Naw, you say. Your government wouldn't do that. Wrong. The U.S. government is compiling massive amounts of information about every person who uses the banking system, and this data collection has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years. The biggest change came with the 2002 passage of the ill-named Patriot Act. That law required banks to seek identification from people who open accounts and increased requirements for reporting bank transactions. These same rules had been blocked by Congress in the two years before because of legitimate concerns over privacy. After the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists attacks, however, all bets were off. People were demanding protection, and Congress moved quickly to establish the Department of Homeland Security. Snooping provisions that had been shelved were dusted off and shoved into the Patriot Act. The government said it needed to be able to track terrorist money coming into the U.S. To do that, it got permission to snoop on every one of us.

Just the financial cost of this law is burdensome. Banks have to check identification when people open or change an account. Bankers look people they have known for years in the eye and demand that they prove just who they are.

All this paperwork is expensive, with nationwide costs in the billions. It's piled on top of tons of paperwork banks already produce for the Internal Revenue Service and bank examiners. This is a major expense in banking, an expense that customers have to pay.

To what benefit? Is it likely that the government can track a few dozen terrorists by watching the bank accounts of millions of Americans? Not hardly. It's possible, but not likely. If past experience is any guide, officials would ignore the terrorist accounts until it was too late, then call for more laws. Meantime, they're building a nifty data bank on all of us.

Government agents can check on your bank activity. Your bank can't even tell you when it happens. The same is true of your library. Terrorists might check out books on making bombs. Agents, operating under the Patriot Act, can check up on what you've been reading. The librarian is barred by law from telling you about the snooping.

Many members of Congress now rue the day they voted for this ill-conceived and dangerous law, but the damage is done. Public outrage over the terrorist attacks created an opening to pass anything in the name of "security."

There is no sentiment now to repeal any of its provisions, despite the obvious threat to privacy and civil rights. Powers once given to the government are seldom taken away.

It seems odd that this massive breach of rights has occurred under a supposedly conservative Republican president.

But under George Bush, the federal government has seized control of local schools with the No Child Left Behind Act, and pushed itself into a dozen different openings. The Patriot Act is simply the greatest threat to liberty. It's far from the only symptom of Big Brotherism.

Patriot Act, indeed. It's a law and a name in the best tradition of George Orwell's "1984."

— Steve Haynes

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Letter to the Editor
Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas would like to say thank you to all of the area Knights of Columbus organizations who contributed to our organization this past year. For many years, people with developmental disabilities have benefited from the generosity and hard work of the Knights who raised thousands of dollars through their Tootsie Roll fund-

raiser. Once again, thank you for making the needs of people with developmental disabilities one of your top priorities. You are making a great difference in peoples lives.

Steve Keil
Director of Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas

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Debate over Kansas' proposed marriage amendment continues...



Midwest attitude leads to long life

I have been blessed all my life to be surrounded by older people. I was a "late in life" baby and the benefit of that was the number of older people I knew. Their age meant little but their joy in life resonated within me.

When one of my daughters-in-law moved here, she said, "I've never been anywhere where they live to be so old and look so good."

This is something I had always taken for granted. Recently while accompanying my mother for some tests, I stood by while she gave her information. She was asked her date of birth, the receptionist looked at me and mouthed "1904?" I nodded. She stared at my mother for about 30 seconds, stunned as she looked at this elegant, very alert, almost 100-year-old woman.

Now what is it about Midwest life that results in longevity?

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



Well, there are some obvious things like no pollution, less crime and so on. But I believe, it is more the attitude about life than the life itself. Midwesterners are more tuned to the cyclic nature of life.

When your livelihood depends on the seasons and the weather you soon learn the validity of; "to everything there is a season". And if you are a farmer each season has its challenges, opportunities and products. Midwesterners apply this reasoning to their lifestyles and rather than

"crunching the numbers" of their years, they expand their opportunities and realize their season and they are proud.

They don't strive to live long lives, they merely strive to live life well and they do this by caring for their neighbors, taking an interest in the community and being involved in life.

The 70+ crowd attending sporting events whether or not they have a family member participating. It is the presence of young people at fiftieth wedding anniversaries and octogenarian birthday celebrations that link the young and the old. Grandparents and friends thrilled with the first soccer game, the first band concert and the first book read all support everyday life.

And that's what life always is, it's about the everyday whether you are old or young or live here or there.

It is about living life.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

To the Editor:

There seems to be a number of rumors and talk concerning the possibility of the Jennings school closing next year. We wish to inform you that the rumors and talk you hear are just that — rumors.

School will be in session next year, educating your children to the best of our abilities. The board has no intention of

closing the school and will keep the district running for as long as it is possible. At this time, we have a full schedule of athletic events for both the junior and senior high school.

The projections are that it should be possible to continue for some time yet, assuming no unforeseen problems develop that are beyond the board's control. The

board wishes to thank you for the support that you have shown for the school district in the past and will be looking forward to future years of educating your children.

Lawrence Carter, Vickie Bailey, Larry Miller, Sarah Carter, Lila Jennings
board member

Lee Stieben, superintendent
Prairie Heights School District

Letter to the Editor,

Thank you for printing my letter as this situation not only effects those of us who work for DSNWK (Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas) but also the whole community of Norton County.

The governor continues to cut monies from people-related services. Those who have the most severe disabilities seem to be one of her favorite targets. Two million dollars has been cut from the Intermediate Care Facilities for the Mentally Retarded portion of the state's budget. This area is the smallest funded but serves those with the most severe disabilities. While she continues to reduce the money to service the intermediate care facilities, she has found \$6 million of new money to increase the funding of the waiting list — those who are in need of services but no room is available in current agencies — thus those who are currently receiving services are having their services reduced.

Does it make sense to cut from a budget which doesn't cover the services of people to bring in more people, which will face a similar fate in the coming years?

Members of the Norton community, I ask that you write to the governor requesting a reduction in the waiting list funds by \$2 million and restore it to the intermediate care facilities budget.

In Norton, DSNWK employs 30-35 people, full and part-time. The majority live and shop within the county. Annual money spent by staff directly into the community totals about \$400,000. The Grant and Eisenhower homes spend over \$30,000 annually on food and supplies. There are more spent by those served for their personal items that would total over \$3,000.

When one looks at the total amount of money DSNWK brings into Norton and Norton County, with the trickle down ef-

fect, it totals almost \$1.2 million annually. I don't know of one business in Norton that can afford to lose that kind of money without it really hurting their bottom line and the number of employees they hire.

Members of the Chamber of Commerce were sent letters a week ago informing them of the situation and how they could assist in keeping the intermediate care facilities homes and day services in Norton. It is hoped that each business figure out how it would help or hinder their business if we were to stay or not. This depends on what the governor and the Legislature does with the budget which effects the mentally disabled.

Can Norton and the county afford to loose \$1.2 million in revenue with the overall economy as it is? I ask all in Norton County to write the governor and our representatives to rescind the cuts.

On a more personal side of this issue, 11 of the 12 people receiving services here have been together since September of 1988. The other one joined us in 1992. We have staff who have been with us from the beginning. We have 21 direct care/para staff who have been here a year or more with 15 of them celebrating five or more years of employment. Mary Ahlemeyer has been with the agency for 10 years; Lisa Shearer, who started as direct care staff out of high school, has been here for 15 years; Rene Readle, 11 years; and I, will soon complete 10 years. When you put that many people together for that many years, you have a family.

The community will be shocked to know how many times the people we serve have been moved from institution to institution. Now, for the first time in their lives they can form trusting relationships, learn things like feeding themselves, walking, toileting, and dressing, and can be responsible for doing

their own laundry because staff ratio allows time for that kind of training.

Do we want them to be uprooted from their "family"? Would you want to be uprooted from your family and not see them again? These people are no different.

Lastly, while cutting the intermediate care facilities budget, the state run institutions — Parsons and KNI in Topeka — are receiving a 3 percent salary increase. The state funding for these two public intermediate care facilities hospitals totals \$47.5 million for the 363 individuals still there. That is costing the taxpayers \$130,854 per person.

DSNWK is serving about 500 individuals in an 18 county area with a budget of \$15.5 million. That's \$31,000 per individual. Looking at these figures, who do you think is more conservative with the taxpayers' money?

I don't know about you, but I'm going to write another letter to the governor and legislators insisting that they look at the budget again and get their priorities straight.

By the way, no one with DSNWK Norton has received a raise in two years and it doesn't look like one will be coming any time soon.

Thank you for writing Gov. Sebelius, the representatives of this district and the rest of the state to let them know where your priorities are and that you are concerned about the economic picture of this community should funds not be reinstated to support the intermediate care facilities programs as well as the welfare of the 12 individuals it will affect.

• Governor Kathleen Sebelius
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Sincerely,
Sondra Graham
DSNWK, Norton
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