

When our government invents crimes

On the Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



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.

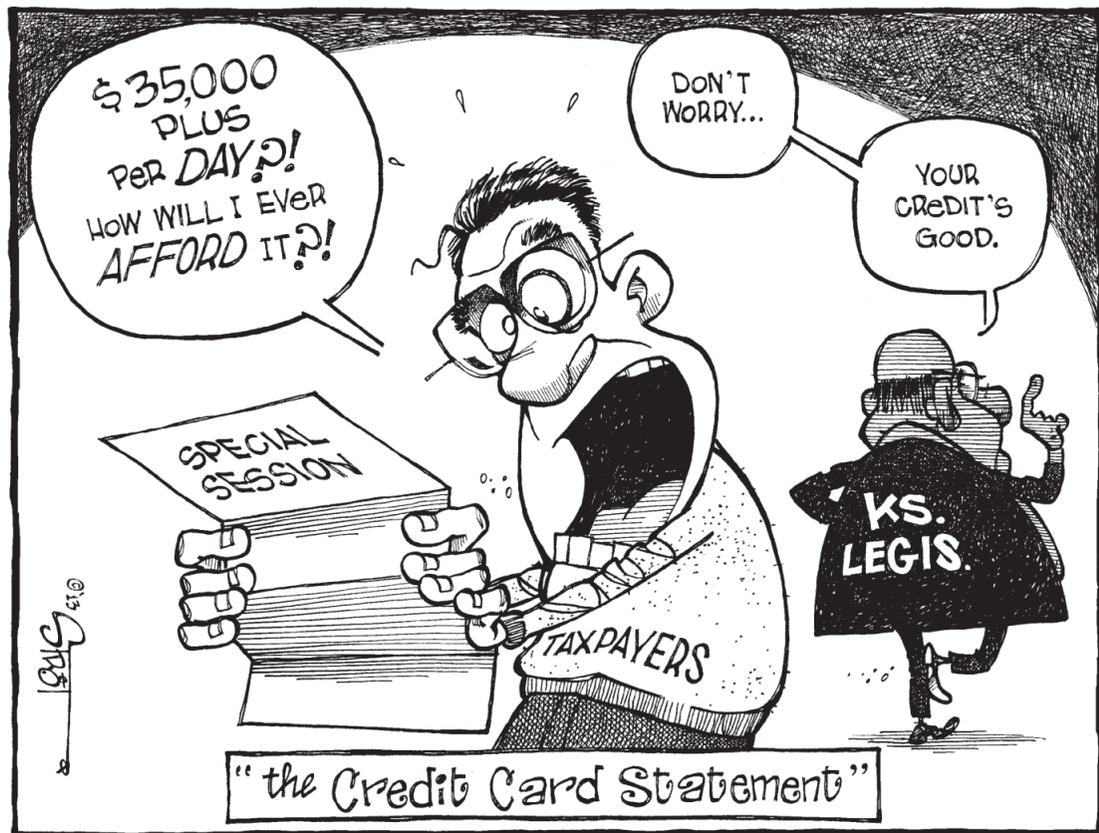
Perhaps the government is doing everyone a favor by getting these guys off the streets, but it seems to us that there ought to be a better way to catch crooks than by cooking up phony crimes. Sting operations are always a little suspect.

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



Contributions made by different religions

People often send me emails. Some are forwarded messages with little regard, it would seem, to the truthfulness within.

Much like the Senator who proclaimed, "It's true. I found it on the Internet." These people believe something, not because it is a reliable source, but because it is something they would like to believe. Often they come from people who, if asked, would tell you what strong Christians they are. These people might be surprised to learn the following:

1. Jesus was not a Christian
2. The Islamic, Jewish and Christian faith all are rooted in Abraham.
3. The destruction of the Christian faith is being accomplished by extremist Christians, not Muslims.

The sad thing about these emails is they are targeting God's people. God created us all, not just the people we like. It is equally dangerous when

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



Christian extremists resort to fear tactics to justify their beliefs, as it is when Muslims do the same. Too often Christ's message is shoved aside in favor of our own beliefs. I find great sadness in a people who have decided their love of hatred is more important than Jesus' message of love.

It is easy to want to stereotype groups. Our blinders make us want to see only black and white. When we see gray areas, we are forced into thinking about our actions. Rather than taking the time to understand a people or a religion, we merely castigate them for their beliefs. We fail to see the contributions all

people make for our world to be what it is...imperfect on one hand, invaluable on the other.

Some fear the word Allah, using it as justification that Muslims don't believe in God. Quite the contrary, they have a monotheistic faith with an all powerful God, just like Jews and Christians. Maybe the line, "The names have been changed to protect..."

Just as I may be Sport to Jack, Mom to my kids, Aunt to my niece and nephews, Mima to my grandchildren, I am still the same person. Muslims call God by the word for God in Arabic...the Allah. In the Jewish tradition, God is called YHVH or Yahweh. Even within Christianity there are many words for God, i.e. in Spanish, God is Dios.

I only ask that people educate themselves before forwarding messages of hatred and lies. Take the time to find out what contributions Muslims, Jews and Christians have made. Mail to: mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

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What being a columnist means to one writer

I was trying to explain my column to someone who had never read it.

"Do you interview people?" he asked.

NO
"Is it news reporting?"

NO
Unfortunately what I do defies explanation.

His wife, who has read some of the things I have written, attempted to help me explain.

"How long is it?" he persisted.

That is a question I could answer. I try to keep it around 600 words.

He seemed impressed, "that's a lot of words!"

"Not really," I confessed. "I like to talk!" Honestly I thought he knew me well enough to know that!

In fact, wordiness is off a problem. I've been ever so gently admonished when I go over 800 words. But sometimes I cannot do a subject justice with less.

On the other hand if I can only come up with 500 words I feel like a slacker!

I admire Mary Kay (whose column always runs with mine) for her brevity. I guess she knows how to make her point.

Most of the time it is unclear (even to me) if I have one!

Believe it or not writing can be very

This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



time consuming.

I recently received the good news I got a slight raise. What it amounted to was I am now getting paid a flat rate per month (the previous equivalent of five columns). I was elated when I first read the explanation of the new reimbursement rate. I thought it said I was getting that much per column, not month! Even though that was not the case, it still works out in my favor because some months I only write four. (Don't tell the boss!)

Except now I'm under pressure to perform every week and sometimes a gal needs a mental health day!
Since the raise was retroactive I have a little extra jingle in my pocket. I was giddy. I said to the hubby, "Let's just you and I go off on an adventure somewhere."

It's been a busy summer. I think we deserve it.

Ever the spontaneous romantic, he suggested we go to Minnesota and pick up some machinery or something!

I decided on a quilting outing with my "Sew Crazy Quilters" group instead!

Even though it appears romance is out, the hubby was very happy for me. He said, "I see how hard you work, and I don't think you get enough rewards for it!" Isn't he sweet?

The most difficult thing about writing the column is I am my own editor. Many times I read my column in the paper and realize there is a grammatical or some other error. When I notice an error, I run to the computer to see if I submitted it that way or if something got lost in translation.

It is most disappointing to discover almost 100 percent I made the error, not the paper.

Daughter Kate has offered to edit for me. Thank you Mrs. Ryan and Mr. Minter! (Because of time constraints I've yet to accept her offer.)

On second thought, the most difficult part of writing is the word thing! It amazes me how often I check the word count and realize it comes in at exactly 666!

I'm sure some of you suspected: yes, it is the devil's number.

Although readers never know, I always add or eliminate a word or two just to reassure myself I am not evil!

So that is what my column is about: it's like Seinfeld, it's mostly about nothing!"

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