

The government is tracking our every movement

How far are we from a world where the government tracks everyone, all the time?

Not far enough.

Texas school districts are experimenting with student ID cards containing a radio frequency responder chip that pinpoints a kid's location. One official explained the frightening aspects of this away by saying, "We're not a government; we're just a school district."

In California, another school district hopes to end online "cyberbullying" and other web-based abuse by having a vendor monitor students' "social media" output day and night.

Around the world, our own federal government scoops up the conversations of everyone from world leaders to American citizens, in electronic spy sweeps supposedly aimed at catching terrorists.

Here at home, more of the same.

And right here in Kansas, school districts hire security firms to conduct sweeps of their buildings and grounds, looking for guns, knives, drugs and more. Officials reason that having those things on school property is against the rules, possibly against the law, and they have a right to enforce the rules on school property.

Apparently the Fourth Amendment is old-fashioned and out of date.

But then, we give ourselves up with all the fancy electronic gizmos we love to carry around. Our cell phones track our movements, wherever we go. Our GPS devices record our every location and how we got there.

The average American collects evidence that could be used by the government, by the local police, by a divorce lawyer or by a snoop neighbor. You never know who might be tapping into your phone and computer records, after all. And you can be sure, the government knows how to get this information, probably without you ever knowing.

How did we get to this point?

There's the badly misnamed Patriot Act, which gives the government access to everything from your bank records to your phone calls. It might be the most un-American law ever. George Orwell could not have come up with a better name.

Then there are school officials, who have a legitimate interest in stopping bullies and in knowing where their students are, and who aren't bothered by the Big Brother aspects of tracking students like this — buy only while on campus, of course.

For now.

The Patriot Act was written by the security agencies, which had tried to get many of its provisions through Congress for years. After the 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, they saw their chance.

Of course, they only use their new-found powers to look for terrorists. Just like the electronic snoopers. And it's easy to believe that German Chancellor Angela Merkel is a terrorist, right?

Easier even to just trust the government, right? Because "they" know what's good for us.

Until the day we wake up, and the government has decided the price of our freedom is too high, and there's not a thing we can do about it, because we were so tracked and tapped and surveilled.

Oh, but that'll never happen, would it?

Well, they'd never listen to our phone calls, right? Just the terrorists'.

— Steve Haynes



Getting caught up on the chores

This the season of rolling up hoses, picking green tomatoes for ripening, raking leaves and planting bulbs for next spring's flowers.

To tell you how far behind I am, I'm still watering, my tomatoes are still on the vine, I have piles of leaves around the yard and I just dug my gladiola bulbs. If the snow that I hear is predicted will hold off a few more days, I may get caught up.

My daughter-in-law, Charlotte, wants some hollyhock seeds. "But only if you have enough," she said.

I had to laugh, "Oh, I have plenty," I told her. "I still have a bucket full."

The seeds I sent out to everyone who requested them, barely made a dent in my supply. It's a dilemma. I can't bring myself to throw them away. Can't find enough takers to give them away either. Wait a minute....I just had a thought. I have an expanse of fence line that would be the perfect backdrop for a nice stand of hollyhocks. Now,

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



all I have to do is convince Jim that he needs to haul the tiller out and dig up a space, oh, about 50 feet long.

I can sprinkle the seeds as thick as I like and my conscience will be clear. I didn't throw the seeds away, and if they grow, they grow. It's every seed for himself.

-ob-

Not that we have any big secrets at our house or that our business affairs would be of interest to anyone, but I have developed the habit of shredding any paperwork that has our name and/or address on it.

It's not a bad thing to do, but another one of those chores that I get behind on. This was to be the week I got caught up on my shredding. I have a basket that collects the daily junk mail and it's reached the overflow point.

I set up my shredding station in the dining room. Plenty of table space to spread out and arrange the specific categories. Pile 1) blank envelopes and papers for recycle. Pile 2) Magazines with the address label removed that I still want to read/keep. Pile 3) Aforementioned address labels and catalog order pages with our name and address. Pile 4) Documents I discover that need to be filed. Pile 5) Catalogs that I want to keep (do they go in Pile 2 or Pile 3?) Pile 6) Newspapers with the mailing labels removed. Pile 7) Mailing labels (no wait, that's Pile 3). Pile 8) Pile 8? Pile 8? Oh, forget it, I'll do it later.

And, that, dear friends, is why we're eating on TV trays this week.

Former ag secretaries talk past and present policy

With more than three decades of collective service under their belts, six former U.S. agricultural secretaries discussed and cussed climate change, international trade, subsidies, crop insurance, food stamps and a bushel basket full of other ag issues Oct. 21.

As part of Kansas State University's Landon Lecture series, participants included Kansan Dan Glickman, John Block, Mike Espy, Mike Johanns, Ed Schafer and Ann Veneman.

Glickman, who served as ag secretary under President Clinton from 1995-2001, said there are great things happening in agriculture.

"Food and agriculture are hot topics today," Glickman told those who packed McCain Auditorium. "They're high up on the agenda, agriculture is part of the international agenda and people all over the world know about this industry."

The farm economy has never been better, Glickman continued.

"After years, and years, and years of low prices and bad economic conditions, we're in an era of a much stronger farm economy," the former Kansas ag secretary noted. "That's not to say there won't still be ups and downs, but the era of agriculture being the weak sister of American economics is over."

The challenge for farmers will be to double food production by 2050 to help feed an estimated 9 billion people, Block said. Block served as ag secretary under President Reagan from 1981-1986.

"We can't let the critics stop us from using new technology," Block said. "We have to use it or not meet our ob-

Insight

John Schlageck



jectives."

Mike Johanns, who served under President Bush from 2005-2008, stressed the importance of hammering out a farm bill but said this wouldn't be enough.

He said this country's farm economy will grow and flourish with an enlightened approach to taxation, university research and world trade.

The lack of consensus on a new farm bill demonstrates the deep philosophical divide in Congress threatening the future of farm legislation, Espy said. He served under Bill Clinton in the early '90s.

The political middle no longer exists, Espy said. Urban Democrats are drawn to food programs and away from production agriculture while rural Republicans push to cut federal programs to the bone.

"The attitude in the House and Senate has changed," Espy continued. "In the line of fire will be agriculture. We've got a real problem, guys."

California's Ann Veneman was sworn in as the first woman Secretary of USDA on Jan. 20, 2001. Secretary Veneman presided over one of the most historic times in American agriculture. Her tenure included record farm in-

come, record agricultural exports and the creation of stronger pest and disease protection systems for the country.

During Veneman's tenure, the Food Stamp Program and child nutrition program were reauthorized and funding increased. As Secretary, Veneman focused on new approaches to help feed the hungry around the world.

Today she continues this challenge to feed the world as well as reduce obesity.

"In addition to the 842 million people that are always hungry, the World Health Organization estimates there are more than 1.4 billion in the world who are overweight," Veneman said.

Veneman says this country faces the same challenges associated with obesity that causes all kinds of additional diseases including diabetes, heart disease, cancer as well as increasing the cost of health care and decreasing individual productivity.

"For far too long we've addressed the issues of hunger and malnutrition by throwing calories at it," the former ag secretary said. "Our focus needs to look at getting nutrition to people today."

Schafer, who served under President George W. Bush, said grains and meats exported throughout the world were accompanied by delivery of American values to countries desperate for stability.

"When you touch the land, you know about responsibility," Schafer said. "Hungry people make unstable governments. Hungry people don't learn. Hungry people don't work."



Thumbs up to Dick Boyd for his outstanding coverage of Blue Jay fall sports. Called in.

I would like to give a thumbs-up to local law enforcement for passing out candy on Halloween. Emailed in.

Many thanks to the J.D. Daffer and Eric Patterson families for donating your time, talent and materials for designing the all sports Blue Jay Booster Club signs to boost every Norton sport qualifying for state competition. Called in

Remember there is no charge for rendering a Thumbs Up. Thumbs Up are meant to give recognition for a positive person or event in the community. Also remember all Letters to the Editor must be signed.

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