

Technology we funded used against us

On the
Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



When the president admits the government operates a massive electronic spying network which scoops up data on our phone calls, our e-mails, our Internet traffic and who knows what all else, but promises this power will be used only against our enemies, do we believe him?

Probably.

He's not too happy that the secret is out, but many people assumed this was going on all along. If it's possible, then you have to figure, some government agency will be doing it. When they say they are not listening to us, just collecting data, we have to believe them.

When he says safeguards built into the system ensure that it can never be used to spy on Americans, should we trust him?

No. And here's why.

We've already seen that the power of government can and will be used against domestic foes of an administration, Democrat or Republican. We need look no farther than the Internal Revenue Service, where senior managers apparently saw nothing wrong with targeting "Tea Party"-aligned nonprofit groups that opposed the administration while green-lighting similar, but liberal-minded, agencies.

But remember Richard Nixon and his pre-Watergate enemies list? He proposed siccing the IRS on his detractors. The tax agency's fearsome reputation makes it a favorite for those bent on abusing power.

One of the dangers of big government is that it concentrates so much power at the hands of a relative few, while the bureaucracy makes it difficult to hold anyone accountable for abuse.

But in the coming era, when computer networks will be able to store everyone's data - and supercomputers are able to process all of it and crunch the numbers, producing recognizable patterns of behavior, what's to keep the system from turning on the citizens who paid to create it?

Nothing but the integrity of those who run it, and we've already seen what that amounts to. Opposing the regime in power could become a pattern to track.

Lord Acton, the British historian, said, "Power corrupts, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely."

He also said, "And remember, where you have a concentration of power in a few hands, all too frequently, men with the mentality of gangsters get control. History has proven that."

It's not that the government has designed a system to spy on those who might threaten it. It's that the system exists, and it could be turned against the people.

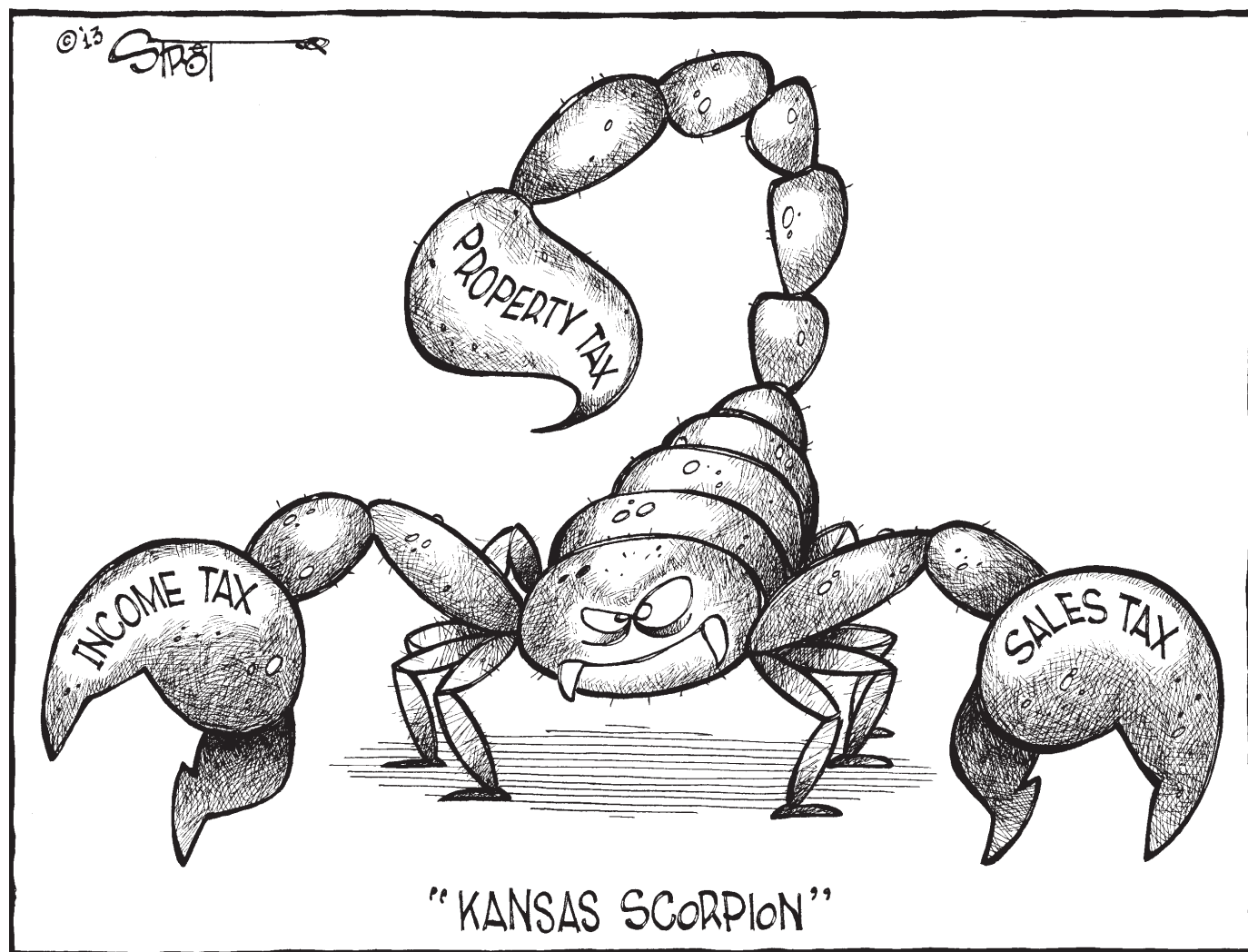
The same techniques built to track terrorists can and will be applied to law enforcement. Eventually, they'll be available to rogue elements, and some, like the rotten-apple IRS executives persecuting the tea partiers, will use them.

As serious scientists gather to discuss the potential of transferring human intelligence to computer systems, it's time to realize that the electronic behemoth itself is a threat to our liberty.

Yes, we should be worried. If "they" are not listening to us today, they could be tomorrow. Such power is easy to abuse.

It's difficult to stop or even slow the advance of technology, but somewhere, somehow, we need to learn to control it and reign in its potential for abuse, before even that becomes something to be tracked.

- Steve Haynes



Those who choose to call Norton home

My Uncle Earl, (Dad) Harrison, made my husband, Jack, see Norton as a very special place to live. Jack's first trip to Norton was in 1964, before we were married. My uncle took him all over the county pointing out the things that made life in this community a treasure. From the rolling pastures, to the stubbled fields and having coffee in the quaint restaurants, it all held an attraction for my effusive uncle. This memory was never far from Jack's heart. When we began to search for places to retire, he thought back to Uncle Earl, and here we are.

Throughout our travels, I have realized people who live in harsher climates must turn to each other for support. Whether it is a death, a drought, or an illness, they are there.

Phase II
Mary Kay
Woodyard



They come to lend a helping hand, bring a meal or comfort a friend, regardless the problem, they come to help in whatever way they can. People in these environments are either strong and courageous to begin with or, by necessity, they become that way. Stories I hear from past and present are of strength, not only of body, but heart and soul as well. These characteristics, I believe, still hold true in the rural

areas of Northwest Kansas.

This column is dedicated to those who call Norton, and the surrounding areas, home, regardless whether they live here now, used to live here or plan on relocating to the area. I want to know why people feel connected to Norton and why Norton is special to each of them. I welcome any thoughts you want to share. I'm not looking for suggestions on how to make Norton better, we have other columns devoted to that. I am looking for the good in what we have and why we are here. Most importantly, I want to get to know individuals who form the patchwork of our community. I want to talk with them and hear their stories. Let me hear your ideas. mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

The beauty and wonder of our national parks

Before we went on our vacation there was some talk about ways to increase gas mileage. Someone had heard of a new type of fuel blend sold in the western U.S.: "Oxygenated Fuel". You'd think if it was a big deal gas stations would advertise it, but we never saw any.

However, we were mostly in resource rich Wyoming. Maybe the gas stations weren't interested in helping us with our fuel economy.

We spent most of our time in Yellowstone National Park. It's sort of a giant science lab. There are some experiments: reintroduction of wolves. But it is mostly left unfettered by human intervention.

A better description of Yellowstone might be "observatory". In 1988, 36 percent of the Park burned. These fires were "observed" and "monitored" until mid-July in accordance with the park's fire management plan. After July 21 attempts were made to suppress all fires.

The U.S. Department of Interior says, "Effort saved human life and property, but had little impact on the fires themselves."

There are dozens of fires in Yellowstone every year. Most are the result of natural causes affecting only an acre or two. One of the consequences of the 1988 fire was "An increase in the public understanding and acceptance of the role of fire woodland area."

Although many mourned the loss of the tall forest, in the end there were few negative outcomes from the fires. Relatively few animals died in the fires. Some species populations increased and some decreased because

This Too
Shall Pass
Nancy
Hagman



of changes in food sources.

Animals are part of the park's allure. Whenever there is an animal sighting people stop. Especially for bears!

My favorites were the buffalo. One morning we were treated to the sight of a massive herd swimming across a river. They crossed the highway right in front of us. (Would someone cue up the "Dances With Wolves" soundtrack, please?)

In Mammoth Hot Springs the clerks in the stores informed customers of the birth of an elk calf right by the Visitors Center. It's a common occurrence according to the park ranger on the scene. The cows come to the populated areas because the newborns are safe from predators.

At another stop we were asked if we saw the bears on the bridge nearby. It appears park policy is to get the word out about animal sightings. When park rangers are nearby, visitors have a safe and enjoyable experience.

The most awe inspiring part of the trip was of course the geysers, mud pots, and volcanic formations the park is famous for.

They are worthy of "observation". Yellowstone is an active volcano. There are between one and three thousand earthquakes in the Yellowstone Caldera each year. New

steam vents, craters and fissures can appear overnight.

Is that terrifying? Or reassuring?

How wonderful life is. We ought to be grateful for the opportunity to observe! For our discerning minds which help us analyze, compare, and reach conclusions.

Change is proof of life.

I purchased the U.S. Department of the Interior's "Yellowstone Resources and Issues Handbook 2013". It is a treasure trove of information. Quotes and facts for this article were taken from this resource.

Throughout the book the Department of the Interior seemed to reassure readers that nature should be allowed to take its course. As to a volcanic eruption "The temperatures, pressures, physical characteristics of partially molten rock and the immensity of the magma chamber are beyond human ability to impact--much less control."

Nonetheless the book devotes quite a bit of space to discussing how man is impacting Yellowstone and the planet. "Climate Change" rears its ugly head.

One factor shaping Yellowstone was glaciers. "Scientists estimate 18,000 years ago most of the park was under 4,000 feet of ice."

What happened to those glaciers? One thing's certain: They didn't melt because of tourists driving around in gas guzzlers, searching for oxygenated fuel!

Do you really think there is such a thing?

All I know is the hubby tried running a tractor on oxygen last night! It didn't work at all!

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