

Government surveillance, who is it for

On the
Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



The revelations continue about the government's secret surveillance system and the vast expansion of federal power it implies, all supervised by closed-door congressional committees and a federal court that meets – and decides – in secret.

Of course, we're assured that we have no reason to fear this system or the court that supervises it. The powers granted the government by the Patriot Act – a dangerous law with an Orwellian name – and later additions are to be used only against foreign enemies of the government.

Officials from the president down promise that only foreign intelligence targets, some of them perhaps operating within the U.S. and some of them even "U.S. persons," some under the microscope of the security net.

Not the rest of us. Having seen how easily the Internal Revenue Service, the supposedly incorruptible tax collector, can be subverted for political purposes, however, can we believe the promises of our government?

How much of a stretch is it from fighting the enemies of our government to fighting the enemies of those who happen to be running the government at any given time?

How far does the security apparatus have to bend to use these new-found powers against the domestic enemies of the government?

In fact, the Patriot Act and allied laws already are used to track domestic crimes, including money laundering and tax evasion. These laws affect not just terrorists, but everyday Americans who want to open a savings account at the local bank or fly on an airplane or use cash to buy something.

It is virtually illegal today to use large amounts of cash for anything. The law presupposed that you must be doing something shady if you're using cash. You have to prove the opposite if the government asks, and they'll keep your cash for you in the meantime, thank you very much.

It's not just the security agencies that want these powers. The tax collectors want them. The drug cops want them. All law enforcement would like to have these powers.

And if they would be used only against the bad guys, why then, who cares? History shows that would not be the case. Powers taken by the government tend to be used for the government's purpose, and eventually, that becomes the preservation of the government. It's but a short slide down this slippery slope to something very different.

Our country has always held the dark forces of government at bay. Now, in the name of fighting terrorists, they stand ready to take the reigns.

The very thought of a secret court, which makes thousands of secret rulings every year, building a body of law no one ever sees, is frightening. The thought of where this could lead, more so.

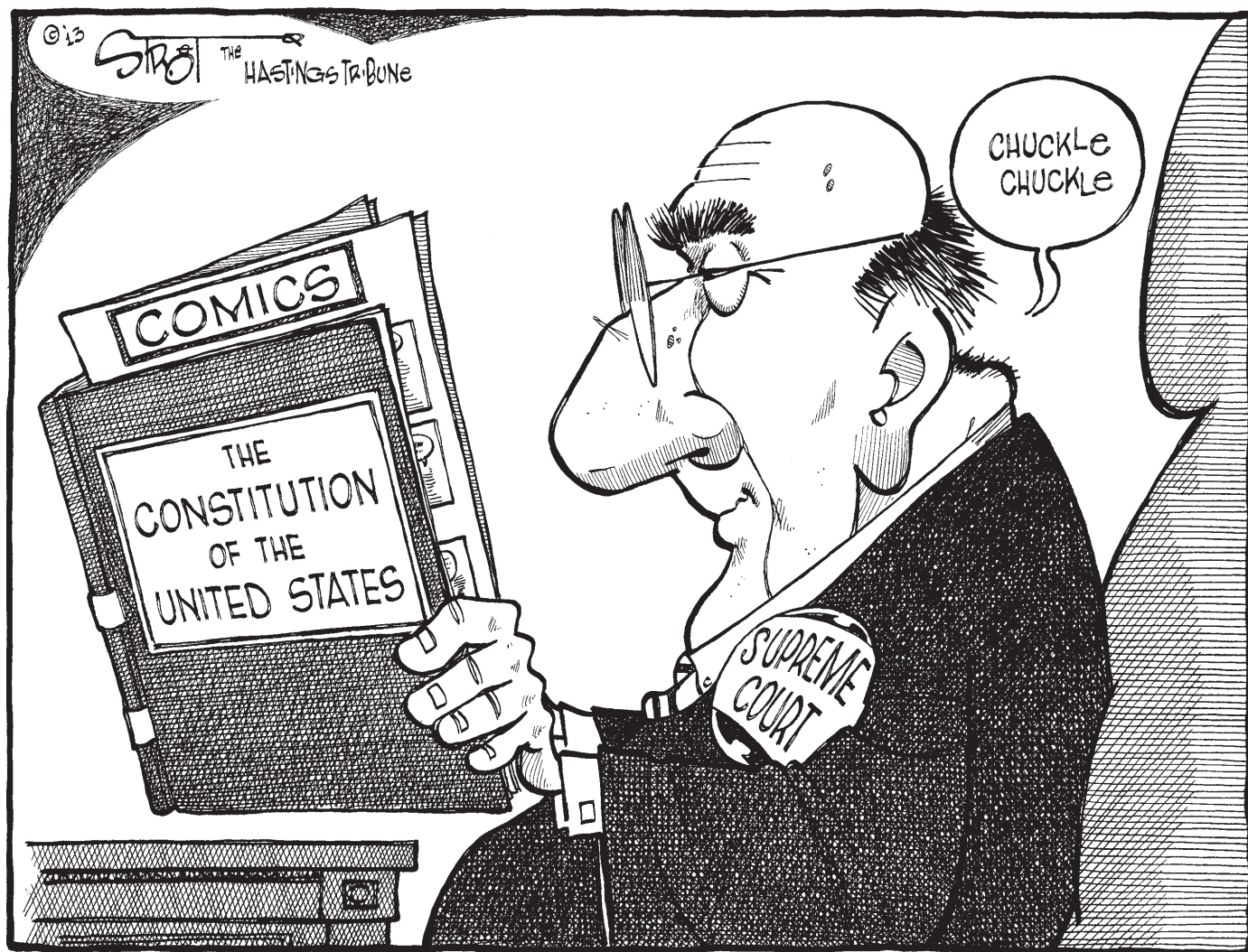
The intelligence court, comprising 25 federal judges from around the country chosen by the chief justice, and meeting in a secure room at the federal courthouse in Washington, surely must be defending our rights today, despite all the snooping into phone and Internet records.

But how will we know that? And how will we know next year or the year after what has followed, when everything is done in secret?

Are the terrorists, in the end, the real threat? Will we even know when the line is crossed?

It's about time this box was opened.

– Steve Haynes



The honey-do list is never ending

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



I was hanging some clothes in the closet when I went to move something on the rod behind the door. Squish! I had stepped in something wet and cold. The cats haven't been in the house for months so I couldn't blame them. It was water. Definitely water. The carpet was soaked. Searching further, a box of old white sheets on the floor was too. The deeper I dug, the worse it got. Soon, everything in the closet was either in the adjoining utility room or draped over a chair in the living room.

Jim found the culprit. A pinhole in the water line going to the outside faucet on the north side of the house had been leaking for who knows how long. Had probably happened during winter. It didn't leak until I turned on the faucet. With all the watering this spring and summer it just got worse and worse. He fixed it, but now what.

It's two days before my friend, who has never been to my house, and before Club. My house is upside down. Carpet has been pulled from the closet, shoes and shoe racks litter the front room, clothes are everywhere. The sheets have been laundered and folded. The closet floor is dry, but the damaged sheetrock still has to come out.

A thorough closet purging has been on my personal "to-do" list for a couple of years. But I had in mind a lengthy winter project when I couldn't get outside. Not a crisis management event.

Well, it is what it is. And IT has to be cleaned up. The house will get what my mother called "a lick and a promise." If it gets done, fine. If not, it's still fine. My club friends won't care, we'll still laugh and talk and have a grand time. My friend, Galene, won't care. Good grief! We lived together in college. She's seen lots worse.

I just have to remember to take the advice I always give others when faced with a daunting task. I ask, "How do you eat an elephant?"

Answer, "One bite at a time."

One farmer finally gets to say, it was our turn

Insight
John Schlageck



In the back of his mind, Winter kept remembering what the "old-timers" always said.

"Wheat is a dry-weather crop."

This prompted Winter to plant more than half the acres he farmed to wheat. Some timely fall rains helped establish a good stand back in October of 2012.

Another factor that led to this year's bumper crop was planting the wheat into some failed fields of dry-land corn and soybeans from the summer of 2012. Because of last summer's drought, this corn and bean cropland had a good amount of residual fertilizer available for the newly sown wheat crop.

Planting this year's wheat crop in these fields just seemed right, Winter says. Being able to rotate this row crop land into wheat also seemed like the right thing to do.

The real game changer for this year's wheat crop occurred in mid-February when the crop was blanketed with 20 inches of snow.

Once in a long while all the chips fall the right way and a Kansas farm family raises the best wheat crop it ever had. The Kent Winter family of northwestern Sedgwick County harvested such a crop in late June of this year.

"It's just incredible when the weather cooperates and you manage to have a few things in place – but it's rare, it's not customary, it's unusual to have such a crop," says Kent Winter. "It was a real blessing for us."

The Sedgwick County farmer started working with his father 30 years ago. He's farmed on his own since his dad retired in the late '90s.

Winter recalls many a year when wheat harvest didn't pan out so well. The year 1967 stands out as a "very thin" harvest because of a dry winter.

However, 2013 will be a wheat harvest the Winter family remembers for a long time. The majority of the 800 acres produced 60 bushels-per-acre or a bit more. A couple of wheat fields pushed the low 70s.

"It was a combination of small incremental things that added up" Winter says. "Most of them were out of our control. We had a lot of help from Mother Nature and a higher power."

The genesis of this outstanding wheat crop started last summer during the multi-year drought in southern Kansas.



Couldn't agree more with the opinion of Laurie Cliff concerning the small town! She put to words the positives of our community. Emailed in.

Thumbs Up to everyone that worked so hard to make the 4th of July celebration at the lake so successful. There are way too many people and organizations involved to name individually but you are appreciated. Emailed in.

Thumbs up. It was an inspiration to see the many youth ball teams shown in a recent supplement addition to the Norton Telegram. Much credit goes to the organizers, coaches, sponsors, and others who helped make these wholesome summer activities possible for the area youth. Emailed in.

THE NORTON TELEGRAM

E-mail:
nortontelegram@nwkansas.com

ISSN 1063-701X

215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654
Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas, Norton, Kan. 67654
Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

Nor'West Newspapers
Dick and Mary Beth Boyd
Publishers, 1970-2002

OFFICE HOURS:
8 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Mon.-Thur.
8 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Friday
Phone: (785) 877-3361
Fax: (785) 877-3732

STAFF

Dana Paxton..... General Manager
Advertising Director/Managing Editor
email: dpaxton@nwkansas.com
Dick Boyd..... Blue Jay Sports
nortontelegram@nwkansas.com
Michael Stephens..... Reporter
Society Editor/Area Sports
mstephens@nwkansas.com
Vicki Henderson..... Computer Production
Marcia Shelton..... Office Manager



Letters to the Editor and Thumbs Up: e-mail dpaxton@nwkansas.com
or to write to: 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kansas 67654