

# Opinion



## A Kansas Viewpoint

### Better things to worry about

There's a growing controversy over the practice of police taking DNA samples from people arrested for major crimes.

Kansas, under a law passed this year, will begin taking samples Jan. 1 from anyone accused of a violent crime. After 2008, anyone accused of a felony will have to give a sample.

Civil liberties lawyers, some of them anyway, are incensed. One claimed building a database of DNA that way would mean "the end of innocent until proven guilty."

That's a silly argument. It means no such thing.

We face many threats to our liberty today, but taking DNA samples from anyone accused of a crime isn't among them.

Still, the American Civil Liberties Union and other groups are wary of the change.

"This is absolutely a line that should not be crossed," said one hysterical lawyer. "It's a very serious infringement of Fourth Amendment rights. (protecting against unreasonable search and seizure)." Bull.

Look at it this way.

For decades, anyone accused of a serious crime had been photographed and fingerprinted as they are booked into jail. Fingerprints are very nearly as unique an identifier as DNA, and in some instances more specific to an individual rather than a family.

If next year, Kansas wants to take photos, front and profile, fingerprints and DNA, that does not compromise the accused's rights.

Simply being in the DNA database does not make one guilty of some future crime, any more than having been booked and fingerprinted does. Either way, you have a rap sheet and a criminal record. That says something about you, but it does not make you guilty of a future crime.

Taking DNA samples may, in fact, serve to protect the innocent. DNA tests can eliminate the innocent and wrongly accused in many violent crimes. If you didn't do it, it's not likely to be your DNA in the sample police took at the scene.

DNA can be far more certain — and sometimes easier to find — than fingerprints. A well-run DNA data bank should help protect the innocent and finger the guilty.

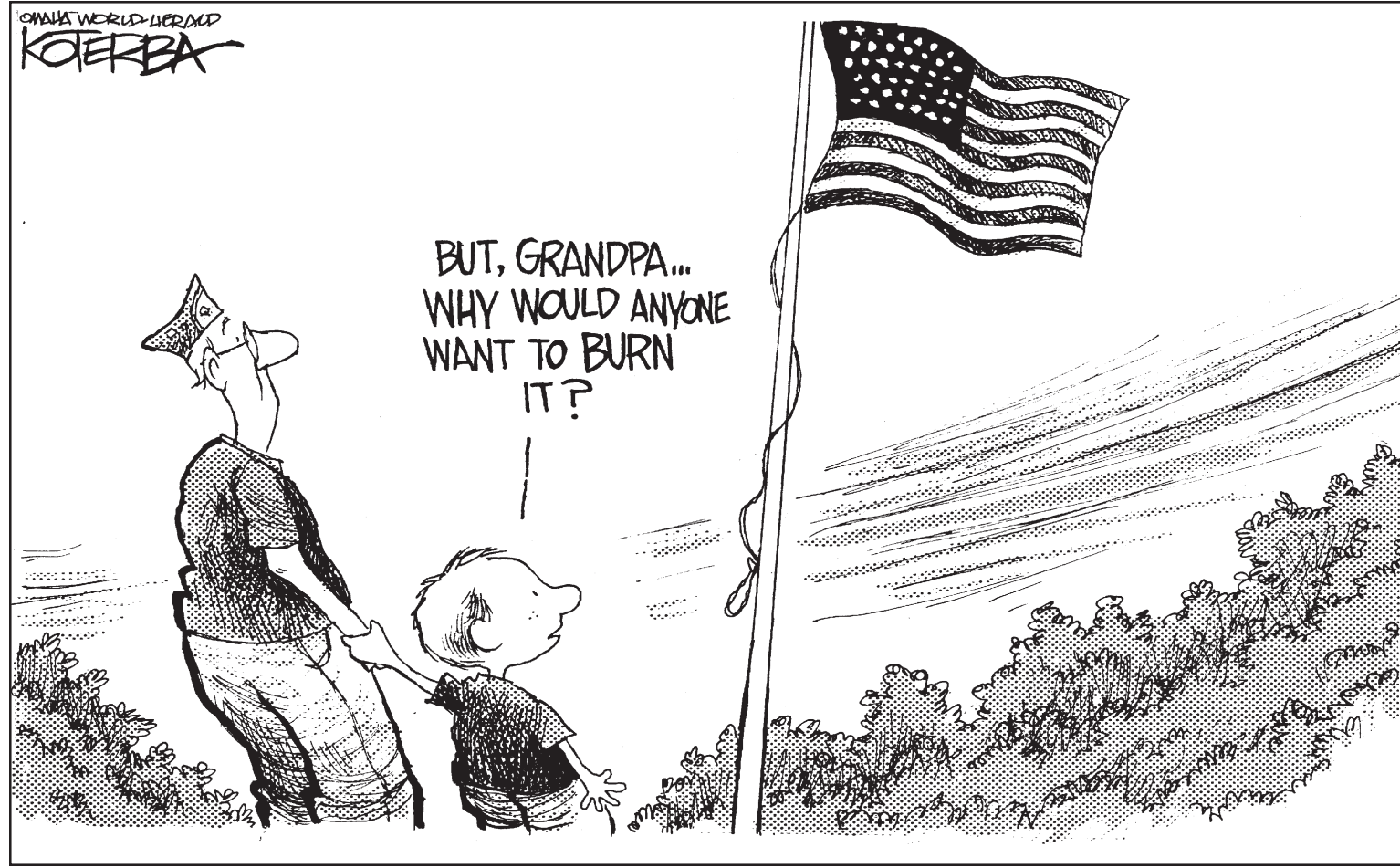
Contrast that with today's system: Only convicts are in the DNA database, and just being there might serve to prejudice the system against former felons.

There are many things the civil liberties lawyers should be worried about in this country: The government snooping in our bank accounts, compiling our phone records, or tracing our movements by tracking our cell phones.

This DNA collection is just an extension of decades-old police practices that help solve crimes and sort the innocent from the guilty. More accurate, perhaps, and using newer technology, but no different from current booking practices.

The ACLU has better things to worry about.

— Steve Haynes is owner of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press.



## Storytelling keeps cultures alive

I think storytelling is vital in any culture.

It is what allows people to communicate, work together and live together. It is what forms the basis for communities.

Therefore, it's not unusual for writers to pass along interesting little facts when we run across them.

This particular group of stories were passed down over time and are explanations for many different things, such as bathing and why June weddings were so popular, along with a few other tidbits.

So, to start this off, remember the next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be.

Whether fact or myth, here's the explanation, which dates back to the 1500s. Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odor. Hence the custom today, of carrying a bouquet when getting married.

Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children—last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it—hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

Houses had thatched roofs—thick straw-piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the dogs, cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof—hence the saying "It's raining cats and dogs."



**Patty Decker**

### • Deep Thoughts

There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could really mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence.

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence.... the saying "dirt poor."

The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on, they kept adding more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entranceway—hence, a "thresh hold."

In those old days, they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes the stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while—hence the rhyme, "Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old."

Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors

came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man "could bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat."

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning and death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or "upper crust."

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up—hence the custom of holding a "wake."

England is old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a "bone-house" and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, 1 out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they thought they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night ("the graveyard shift") to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be "saved by the bell" or was considered a "dead ringer."

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Fridays.

## Big powers kill Internet neutrality

By Neil Tambe and Eric Warren

The U.S. Senate is now considering legislation that would ensure the Internet remains based on a principle of equal and open connectivity. Opponents of so-called network neutrality legislation have contributed to senators' campaigns and political action committees more than three times as much money as the legislation's proponents.

That disparity may have helped sink a similar provision that the House of Representatives considered in June.

The net neutrality debate pits online computer services against a coalition of telephone utilities, telecommunications companies and cable distributors—the companies that provide the content versus those that transmit it.

Both sides of the Internet regulation debate are active political contributors. However, in total, the Internet sector has contributed a mere \$2.7 million compared with \$9.1 million in federal contributions from the telecom-telephone alliance.

More entrenched in politics than relative newcomers in the Internet sector, telecom companies seek influence on a wider array of issues. Despite the disparity, several senators have stood up already in favor of adding network neutrality protections to the Senate's version of a communications reform bill.

Neutrality legislation aims to prevent broadband Internet service providers (ISPs) from discriminating between content. The Federal Communications Commission set ablaze the current debate on Aug. 5, 2005, when it announced it would refuse to enforce neutrality without a mandate from Congress.

Proponents of neutrality legislation want the government to regulate the Internet to prevent network controllers from providing superior access to higher-paying customers. They also say that without neutrality protections, ISPs would be able to slow or block web sites of their choosing, including those of their competitors.

The telecommunications alliance claims that these allegations are unfounded, because competitive markets would prevent network controllers from abusing consumers.

If one provider is unsatisfactory, they argue, consumers would switch providers. They also make the case that distributors of online content should help bear the cost of upgrading networks, and that government regulation would keep broadband prices high and hinder the spread of fast connections to rural areas.

Three senators who have bravely introduced neutrality legislation in the past six months—Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), and Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.)—have each received sizable contributions from groups opposed to the sort of law they are advocating. Only two senators received notably larger contributions from pro-network neutrality groups: Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray, both Democrats from Washington, have been funded extensively by Washington-based Microsoft, a major backer of net neutrality and a deep political player.

In the House, similar to the situation in the Senate, substantial campaign contributions from telecom, including almost \$87,000 from AT&T since 1989, were not enough to deter Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) from introducing pro-neutrality legislation to the House version of the communications reform bill. Markey's amend-

ment failed on June 8 by a vote of 269 to 152, with all but 11 Republicans voting against it. The final communications bill, with mostly Democratic opposition, passed by a large margin.

Those Congress members voting against Markey's amendment received an average of nearly \$10,000 more in contributions from the anti-neutrality coalition. It is not clear whether the extra \$10,000 swayed the House vote, but the telecom interests prevailed.

Not only did these industries contribute to federal candidates, they spent substantially more on lobbying.

In the 2003 to 2004 election cycle, companies on both sides of the issue spent a total of nearly \$300 million lobbying in Washington; D.C., industries favoring neutrality put out \$43.8 million, whereas industries opposing it gave just over \$255 million. Complete data from the 2005 to 2006 cycle is not yet available.

Even though the coalition fighting neutrality legislation did not win over every member of Congress to whom the telecom industry contributed substantially, this data suggests that political contributions succeeded. The House's version of the communications reform bill passed without any neutrality protections. If the House vote and campaign finance data are any indicators, network neutrality can be expected to fail in the Senate as well.

Neil Tambe and Eric Warren write for *CapitalEye.org*, the newsletter of the Center for Responsive Politics, a non-partisan research organization in Washington, D.C., that tracks the influence of money on elections and public policy.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [jvannostrand@nwkansan.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansan.com) or [pdecker@nwkansan.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansan.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect the Free Press.

### COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963 Colby, Kan. 67701

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Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

**John Van Nostrand - Publisher**

[jvannostrand@nwkansan.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansan.com)

#### NEWS

**Patty Decker - Editor**

[pdecker@nwkansan.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansan.com)

**Tisha Cox - General Assignment**

[tcx@nwkansan.com](mailto:tcx@nwkansan.com)

**Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter**

[ackermanjk@ruraltel.net](mailto:ackermanjk@ruraltel.net)

#### ADVERTISING

**Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director**

[crystalr@nwkansan.com](mailto:crystalr@nwkansan.com)

**Jasmine Crotinger - Advertising Sales**

[jasminec@nwkansan.com](mailto:jasminec@nwkansan.com)

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

**Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager**

[lea@nwkansan.com](mailto:lea@nwkansan.com)

**Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping & Ad Building**

[japplegate@nwkansan.com](mailto:japplegate@nwkansan.com)

**Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator**

[support@nwkansan.com](mailto:support@nwkansan.com)

#### NOR'WEST PRESS

**Jim Bowker - General Manager**

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Ron VanLoenen, Judy McKnight

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