

Free Press Viewpoint

Surveillance record extends to drivers

A nationwide study by the American Civil Liberties Union reveals that the cops know not just whether you've been naughty or nice – but where you've been doing it.

Agencies, mostly city and county departments, are using license-tag scanners, cameras programmed to record licenses and their location, all day and all night. Located on a patrol car, on bridges or buildings, anywhere they can "see" traffic, these cameras are remarkably efficient.

Minneapolis, with just eight units, captured 4.9 million locations in the first eight months of last year. They got the mayor's car 41 times. At first, police treated the database as a public record. Anyone could come ask for a report on any tag. Later, they decided the information was "classified."

As more and more cameras appear, more agencies join the movement, more vehicles are logged, the information increasingly goes into regional data bases that can produce a remarkably detailed picture of our daily activities.

It is, the union says, "a single high-resolution image of our lives."

"There's just a fundamental question of whether we're going to live in a society where these dragnet surveillance systems become routine," said Catherine Crump, a staff lawyer with the organization.

The group says it wants police departments to delete information on all vehicles except those actually linked to a crime, but of course, that's part of the beauty of the system. Your car might not be linked to a crime today, but who knows when someone might want to know where you've been?

People have no expectation of privacy when driving or parked on a public street, one police official noted. And that's true enough. Departments have checked licenses and logged locations for years, but until now, it was a low-efficiency game.

And true enough, we're all tracking ourselves by carrying cell phones, global positioning devices and other electronic gear. We walk on streets surveilled by cameras and pass through security at the airport.

The question the study asks is, "Do we really need Big Brother watching our every move?"

Some will say, if you're not doing anything wrong, why worry? The government will reassure us that we have nothing to fear, the scanners are only to track the bad guys. But they said that about the Internal Revenue Service.

In our view, no agency needs to gather and store this kind of information. Government agencies of all types already have way too much data stored away on citizens already. And it's not just an innocent system designed to catch bad guys.

Information is power, and when "they" have enough, it could come to the point where the citizens are no longer in charge.

No one should have that kind of power. As citizens, we need to take a stand now, before it's too late. — Steve Haynes

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

R.B. Headley - Sports Editor
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Sam Dieter - News Reporter
colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Heather Alwin - Society Editor
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Office Manager

Melissa Edmondson - Office Manager
medmondson@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

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How do you measure overmeasurement?

My husband measures everything.

Maybe it's a man thing. Have you every noticed how many measuring devices men keep in their garages, tool sheds and junk drawers? Yardsticks, tape measures and calibrated wrenches, saws and drills.

I realized that Steve had a measuring addiction when he started wearing his pedometer on vacation.

Now, I can understand measuring your steps when you go out for a walk to see how much exercise you are getting. But when you're headed for a beach in Mexico, not so much. Besides it always drives the TSA guys at airport security nuts, because he never remembers to take it off his belt.

Well, I suppose that in itself might be one benefit.

However, back to my theory that my husband is addicted to measuring things.

He has two rain gauges. One we keep on the porch to measure rain. That one is seldom used. The second is in the garden. It measures rain and the amount of water that goes on the garden. While that may seem a reasonable thing to want to know, we've been watering the garden the same amount for the last 20



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

years, and the gauge always reads the same unless he forgets to dump it or we accidentally get some rain.

He checks the weather channel almost every day to see what the temperatures will be for the next week. I mean, let's face it. If it's summer, it's going to be hot. If it's winter, it'll be cold. What are you going to do differently if it's 85 degrees out today or 95?

I caught him measuring the number of charcoals he was using for the barbecue grill the other night. I'll swear he was counting them out – not just pouring them in and eyeballing them for the right amount for eight steak sandwiches.

And we're not even going to go into the Garmin in the car, which can measure miles per hour, how long it'll take to get there and how

much fuel you're using. He loves that thing.

He measures when he cooks, too.

Of course, we all measure when we cook. Very few of us can come up with a cupful without a measuring cup, and it's important not to get too much or too little baking powder or baking soda in a recipe.

But there are a lot of things that just don't need a measuring cup or a spoon. Things like salt and pepper, onion and garlic.

I can measure a teaspoon of salt in the palm of my hand and eyeball a half cup of diced onion. Who cares if I'm an eighth of a cup off. It's onion. It's all good.

Not Steve. He's precise. He doesn't put too much or too little of anything into a recipe.

He's addicted, I tell you but as long as I can keep him cooking, I'm not going to start an intervention. I know when I have a good thing going.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Trust is the coin of the realm

There is deep distaste for the extreme polarization and politicization that our government institutions have displayed.

Back in June, Gallup released a survey that got a fair bit of attention for its headline finding: only 10 percent of Americans trust Congress as an institution. Think about it. If you walk into a cafe today and there are nine other people in there reading the paper or staring into their laptops, only one of you in the room has faith that the body charged with making our nation's laws can do its job right.

What didn't get quite as much coverage was the fact that Congress was just one of 16 institutions whose public standing Gallup measured. Atop the list in Americans' confidence was the military, followed by small business and the police. Then came organized religion, which about half of Americans trust.

The bad news in the poll arrived after that. The fifth most-trusted institution is the presidency – but it enjoyed the confidence of only 36 percent of poll respondents. The Supreme Court stood at 34 percent, down three points from last year. Add Congress into the mix, and these are deeply unsettling numbers.

What lies behind Americans' doubts and cynicism about the three major branches of the federal government – with the exception of the military – is undoubtedly a mix of factors. But I suspect it rests most heavily on a broad perception of dysfunction and a deep distaste for the extreme polarization and politicization these institutions have displayed.

We've always looked on the Supreme Court as standing above politics, for instance. Most noticeably starting with its Bush v. Gore decision in the wake of the 2000 elections, however, the Court has come to be seen as divided into political factions, with each trying to advance its own agenda. It is now perceived less as an institution of law and more as a political institution.

Congress and the presidency, of course, are political institutions. But the current tenor of American politics works against them. Cam-

Other Opinions

• Lee Hamilton Center on Congress

paigns are as much or more about attacking the other candidate as they are about debating substantive issues. Every move that members of Congress make – and that many Republicans believe the President makes – appears to be about "playing to the base" or putting the other side in an uncomfortable spot. Resolving problems because they need to be resolved – especially the ones that Americans consider most important, like jobs and the economy – doesn't seem to be on the agenda.

Americans' lack of confidence in their governing institutions makes correcting most any political or policy problem more difficult. The voters are less open to policy-making or reform, since they don't trust that government can actually solve the issue in front of it. Politicians tend to back away from bold initiatives and become less willing to speak out or to act, because they anticipate the dubious stance with which their proposals will be received.

Much-needed reforms – to repair the tax system, for instance, or to reshape government institutions – will be met with skepticism if not indifference. The result is that only very modest efforts can be expected, reaffirming voters' belief that government can't be trusted to work, and fueling political tensions that rise when problems remain unresolved.

Government relies on policy direction and resources allotted by policy makers to do its job. But it relies equally strongly on trust. It may be trite to say that "trust is the coin of the realm," but it's no less true for that. Without it, our institutions simply cannot be effective.

I don't expect this recent poll to be seen as

a wake-up call in Washington. The city seems too embroiled in its own machinations to be worried about such matters as "trust." Yet it is also true that if members of Congress, the White House, and even Supreme Court justices want Americans to treat them seriously – to listen to them, believe them, and above all believe in the institutions they serve – then they won't treat our declining confidence in them lightly. They have to invigorate their efforts to renew Americans' trust. Because unless they can do that, it will get harder and harder for them to do their jobs.

Lee Hamilton is Director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774
roberts.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966.
Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 136-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov

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