

from our viewpoint...

Americans need to change notions

A senior government official suggests that Americans need to give up their old notions of privacy and move boldly into the brave new world.

Donald Kerr, deputy director of national intelligence, told a group in Texas that in the Internet age, when everything is online, it's not possible to be anonymous.

What we need are safeguards to ensure that government and corporations don't misuse our data or our identities, he said. Trust us, said the government man.

Kerr alleged that the younger generation willingly surrenders its anonymity to "networking" websites such as Face Book. Anyone who thinks differently, he said, should type his or her own name into an Internet search program.

Government employees face up to five years in prison if they misuse private information, he noted.

"Those two generations younger than we are have a very different idea of what is essential privacy, what they would wish to protect about their lives and affairs," Mr. Kerr was quoted as saying by the Associated Press. "And so, it's not for us to inflict one size fits all. Protecting anonymity isn't a fight that can be won. Anyone that's typed in their name on Google understands that."

"Our job now is to engage in a productive debate, which focuses on privacy as a component of appropriate levels of security and public safety."

Privacy advocates pointed out, though, that it's a far cry from posting your personal data on FaceBook to having the government scoop up your information, maybe your most private communications, in a "sweep" of Internet transactions.

Corporations that want our business ask us to trust them with our credit card numbers and other vital information. We do so, if we want to shop on the Internet, or we go downtown and buy what we need.

No one has much choice about the government collecting data on them, however. The government registers births and deaths and, in this fearful age, requires people to produce hard identification to get a loan or open a bank account.

While those rules, part of the controversial Patriot Act, are supposed to help fight terrorism, most people suspect it's regular Americans the government wants to track, especially those who don't like to pay taxes.

Similarly, the government claims the right to inspect any communication — including e-mail — that lands outside the U.S. without the search warrant required for calls and messages inside the country.

The government says it's after terrorists again, but who's to say how it will use the information it finds. Already, people are being arrested on the basis of contraband found in suitcases at the airport.

Sure, no one has to fly and for sure, no one has to fly with drugs in their luggage, but the practice illustrates one facet of increasing government intrusion into every life: The government may say it's here to help, but it has its own agenda.

Finding tax cheats and illegal aliens may be part of the goal, but how do you write safeguards that insure that information will never be used for improper purposes?

And what of the time when the people may decide the government no longer serves them, but wants citizens to serve it?

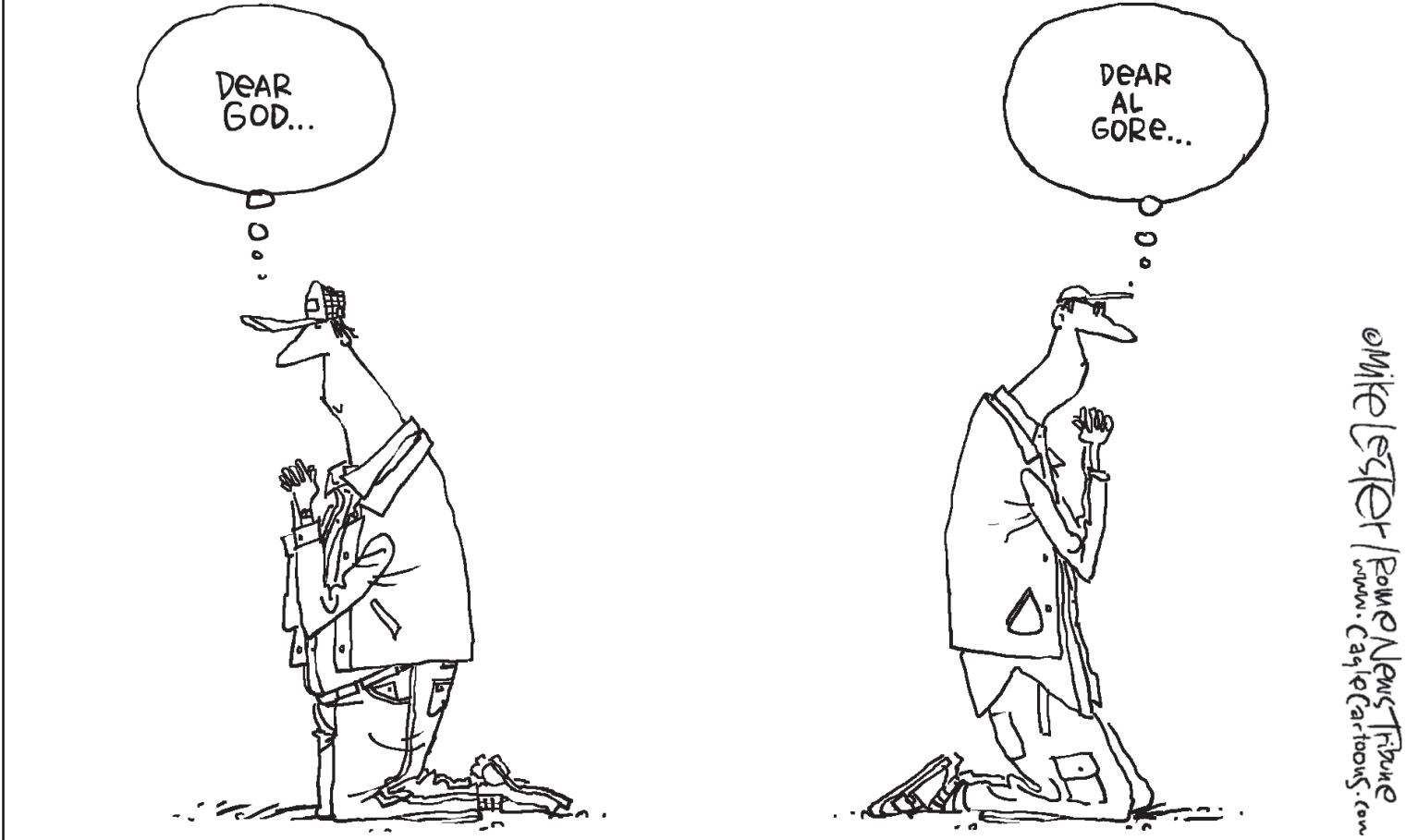
The government might say that any use it makes of data banks to suppress opposition is a just use, but would that be true?

Can we really trust our government to know everything? To know so much about us?

Or would we be better off if it remains half blind and short of memory?

Our vote is with the people and against growing the database, but that's not likely to stop the spread or limit the reach of government snoops. Someone should. — Steve Haynes

PRAYING FOR RAIN



Red suitcases attract attention

Red sports cars, they say, attract the cops' attention and get more tickets than any other kind of car.

This is probably true. I haven't had a speeding ticket since I mostly gave up my little red sports car. I haven't altogether forsworn it, but I'm careful to use the cruise control these days and avoid speeding.

Red suitcases seem to have the same power.

Steve got me a matching set of red carryon luggage for Christmas last year. I was ecstatic. The larger piece was a 21-inch roll-on and the smaller bag fit under an airline seat. I thought it was the perfect short-haul set and would work well as my carryons for longer flights, when I would also take a checked bag or two.

I used my red suitcases successfully on domestic flights going to Atlanta, Ga.; Norfolk, Va.; Washington; and St. Paul. They went to Tunisia and Mexico with no problems.

Steve was sort of jealous. I could get a bit more stuff in my 21-inch red bag than he could get in his black 20-incher.

However, on our recent trip to China and Vietnam, he decided he liked his slightly smaller, slightly less distinctive bag just fine.

I did fine flying to Los Angeles and had



cynthia haynes
• open season

no trouble getting onto China Air for Taipei, Taiwan. When it came time to fly from Taipei to Saigon, my bags and I zipped though all the lines.

It was in Vietnam that I started to have trouble, and I wasn't the only one.

After two days in Saigon, now called Ho Chi Minh City or HCM, we had to fly to the capitol of Hanoi aboard Vietnam Air.

At the check-in counter, one woman collected overweight baggage fees from nearly everyone — \$50 from one couple — while at the next line, the woman overlooked the weights. Last time I checked, our leader was still trying to get refunds on those cash "contributions."

I chose the "right" line and we checked our bags and headed for security.

That was when the trouble started.

An earnest young woman was guarding the door to security. She took one look at my bag and decided it was too big and probably overweight, because Vietnam Air only allowed a person to carry on 7 kilograms. I'm

not sure how much that is in pounds, but my 21-inch weighed about twice that.

To make matters worse, it wouldn't fit in the metal rack she had.

The sign proclaimed that bags couldn't be larger than 22 inches. Well, mine wasn't, but it wouldn't fit in her rack and she was sure I needed to check it. She also snagged the next guy in our line and while he was arguing with her, everyone else with 21-inch carryons slipped past and through security.

Steve finally took my bag back to the "good" line and checked it.

We had the same trouble leaving Hanoi for Hong Kong a few days later and again checked the offending red bag.

I couldn't believe it when I ran into the same problem in Hong Kong. Here, however, our interpreter and guide came to my rescue. I could take the bag with me. I just had to have a sticker saying it was oversized, he said. It took a trip back to the check-in counter, but my bag went inside with me. This was good, because in Hong Kong I had acquired another bag and had used up my two-bag checked allotment.

Back in the states, I flew back to St. Paul last week. The check-in lady looked at my bag but waived me on.

It's good to be back in the U.S. where you only get a ticket for speeding in your car, not for your red baggage.

Are property rights exclusive?

To the Editor:
In response to the recent reprint of the editorial regarding the prairie dog issue I'd like for you to consider the following thoughts.

While it is true that Larry Haverfield is in fact guaranteed the right to own his property unmolested by others, including the government, his right is in no way exclusive of the property rights of his neighbors.

Haverfield has a legal claim to his land and is free to conduct his business as he sees fit until his actions, or lack of them, as the case may be, negatively affect the property rights of others.

None of us live here alone. We are citizens in a community, and as such we have a responsibility to others.

To put this in an urban context, let's say that next door to your newspaper office in Goodland a gentleman decides to build a structure. Let's say he decides to wire the building himself and not follow the established building code of Goodland.

As you walk by his building one day, you notice through the window that the method of his wiring is extremely dangerous and will likely cause a fire.

I ask you, does your neighbor have property rights to the exclusion of yours? Wouldn't you feel it the duty of your elected officials to address this problem and rectify it before it caused your business damage?

Wouldn't you support this action even if your neighbor resisted?

As a way to mitigate the issue, perhaps your



from our readers
• to the editor

elected officials choose to merely correct the faulty wiring instead of condemning the property. Wouldn't you agree to this tactic? Wouldn't it seem fair that your neighbor should be billed for this taxpayer expense?

Ever since Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked that lantern over and the resulting fire burned down most of Chicago,*** folks have been pretty amenable about the need for and the benefit of building codes in protecting their property. Rural folks have the same desires as urban folks to protect their property from damage caused by others.

Think of it as zoning. There are some places that you just can't do some things because the impact on the surrounding people is felt to be negative to those involved. If Haverfield has a desire to let the prairie dogs run free, may I suggest that he find a nice ranch in the Peoples Republic of Boulder County, Colo. Here, prairie dogs are left to run wild and he will likely arrive to a hero's welcome.

The key to this issue is that Haverfield has neglected his duty to his neighbors. If he has an interest in keeping prairie dogs on his land, then the responsibility is his to discover a way to accomplish this so it does not negatively affect his neighbor's property rights.

For those who may argue that prairie dogs are benign and even helpful creatures that have no negative effect on grazing lands, I ask them to consider this: All animals alive eat. Most grazing animals eat between 2 percent and 5 percent of their body weight each day. It is not uncommon to find hundreds of pounds of prairie dogs per acre.

Prairie dogs eat grass. Ranchers make their living from grass. Farmers can't farm with prairie dogs present; they eat the seed.

Prairie dogs do not magically make grass grow better and somehow negate their impact. Grass grows in response to temperature, moisture, sunlight and nutrients. Left unchecked, prairie dogs will overtake an area and actually damage the grasslands. This is true for prairie dogs as well as cows. As they become overpopulated, the grassland cannot produce enough sustenance but the prairie dogs still must eat. They will then dig out the grass roots simply to survive. For those who depend on healthy grasslands, including the prairie dogs themselves, this final act of desperation is tragic.

The natural forces that once checked prairie dog populations are long gone. It is up to mankind to take the responsibility and learn how to keep the balance so as to protect all species that live on the land — including man. This must all be accomplished while respecting our neighbor's properties rights and their livelihoods.

Kenneth J. Klemm
Goodland

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