

from our viewpoint...

Protecting privacy not real objective

In an age when one government official flatly tells us we have no right to expect privacy any more, the government spends a lot of time — and money — telling us how it protects our privacy.

That's a joke, of course. The government is the biggest threat to our privacy. And it exempts itself from any law designed to protect us.

Take the health-care privacy rules under the law known as HIPAA. The government says it's protecting citizens — that's us — from having our privacy invaded by insurance companies and other big corporations. Of course, the government can get our medical records any time it wants them. It's exempt from these rules.

New health privacy rules cost the insurance and medical industries billions of dollars spent to change computer programs, building layouts and information sharing rules. Customers foot the bill.

We've yet to hear from a taxpayer who feels more secure as a result.

But many complain about new policies under the regulations which put an end to publication of hospital admissions (always voluntary on the part of the patients) in community newspapers, to pastors getting notice when a church member is in the hospital, to even having the names of patients on their door in some places.

It's illegal to listen in on people's telephone conversations, of course, unless you happen to be the government. Then, it's patriotic.

In the old days, the government had to go to court and get a warrant to tap the phones of a Mafia chief. Today, it simply orders AT&T to turn over all the calls going through its switching centers that begin or end in a foreign land. No warrant required.

The government says it's looking for bad guys, international terrorists and such. But many small fry could get caught in this net. When the government starts listening to long-distance calls looking for terrorists, it's not going to ignore tax cheats, drug runners and white-collar criminals. Constitutional rights just sort of disappear.

As many who forgot they had contraband in the airline luggage have learned, you don't have to be a terrorist to get caught in the security net. You just have to be at the airport.

Airport security, of course, is designed to prevent attacks on the air traffic system. But security screeners are told not to ignore evidence of other crimes as they search your bags, no matter how trivial.

Your bank account? Your bank is watching that for the government. You'd best not deposit too much cash at any one time. The bank is required to report you.

Today, you have to give "proper identification" to open a bank account, just in case you might be a terrorist. Or a tax cheat. Federal rules make your bank a real partner with the security goon when it comes to watching us.

Now, it's the fire department. In New York, Homeland Security is training firemen to look for terrorists as they go about their duties inspecting buildings and the like. Firemen get into places without a warrant that now law enforcement officers can't reach. Now, they'll be reporting on citizens, too.

There may be other ways the government infringes on our privacy. We just don't know about them yet. Maybe we'll never know. You can bet they're out there. The anti-snoops try, but the government is always ahead of them.

Doesn't that make you feel safe and comfortable?

— Steve Haynes



My Cinderella teams keep finding frogs

It's been a Cinderella year for my teams. Unfortunately, Cinderella keeps meeting the Prince, she kisses him and she turns into a frog.

The Rockies made it to the World Series and the University of Kansas won 11 in a row — in football.

Yeah, I'm a KU graduate. How did you guess?

Steve and I aren't big television addicts. In fact, we almost never watch the tube. As I write this column early Sunday morning, the television I wanted for my kitchen is turned on — to satellite radio. I'm listening to music, which is what the sets in our house do the most — broadcast a blue and white stripe with the name of the song, artist and label on it.

But Saturday night, we had to watch the big KU-MU game on the upstairs television — the big one.

Hey, in our world, a 26-inch television is a big one.

We decided supper would be club sandwiches and leftover cranberry sauce at half-time.

Steve got the game on my kitchen set and then went upstairs to tune in the big one and



cynthia haynes

• open season

plow in his easy chair while I got the bacon fried so that we could put the sandwiches together and eat quickly at midgame.

By the time I got everything laid out, it was midway through the first quarter and the teams seemed to be doing no more than trading the football back and forth.

Upstairs, Steve was watching the action with one eye and reading a leftover *Rocky Mountain News* with the other.

That seemed like a good idea, so I tried it. I had worked my way through the travel and entertainment sections before Missouri scored.

By then I was restless and started folding the clothes, which had been sitting in the sitting room for a week. This didn't take long, so I started putting them away.

Missouri scored again.

This game was going the wrong way and I

was bored. Thank God for half-time.

I got out lettuce and pickles, sliced cheese and toasted bread while Steve assembled our supper, then turned the kitchen television down. We didn't need the announcers to tell us how bad our team was doing while we ate.

The game started up before we were done, and I cleaned up while Steve returned to his big screen, easy chair and *Rocky*.

While things went better for us in the second half, I couldn't get into the game. I would watch for a while, then get up and wander off.

I discovered that cleaning the cat boxes and refilling the humidifiers were more interesting than watching the game.

Maybe if KU had done better or maybe if I had listened to the game on the radio where I could have gone about my business and still listened, I would have been more interested.

Ah well, my alma mater's prince may have turned into a frog but she'll still get to go to a ball, or bowl, and we can always use our Rockies fight song — "Wait until next year."

Steve said something about listening to a KU basketball game.

The trial of Santa Claus

By 2007, Santa Claus, a beloved figure in America for more than a hundred years, had fallen out of sync with the times. And so it was that America decided to prosecute him.

"Your honor, the prosecution calls Mr. Santa Claus to the witness stand."

"Proceed," says the judge.

Claus is sworn in and seated. The prosecutor begins to pace before the jury.

"Though it is hardly criminal to parade around as a jolly old fat man whose spirit is the personification of charity and goodwill," says the prosecutor, "is it not against the law for our tolerant government to in any way sanction any religion? Are you not a religious man, Mr. Claus?"

"Ho, ho, ho," says Claus, smiling. "My origin dates back many years to Holland to a fellow known as 'Sinterklaas.' But one of my primary inspirations was Saint Nicholas, a 4th century Christian bishop who was generous to the poor."

"Aha!" says the prosecutor. "A Christian bishop?"

"But today," continues Claus, "I've evolved to represent all things good and charitable. Even the Supreme Court, in weighing the constitutionality of using Santa figures on public property, determined me to be a marker of seasonal celebration. I am not a religious symbol."

"Touche," says the prosecutor. "But we are just getting warmed up with you, Mr. Claus."

"Would the prosecution please not waste the court's time," says the judge.

"Your honor, I hold in my hand the sworn affidavits of thousands of people who all make the same accusation against Mr. Claus: breaking and entering. Mr. Claus gained entrance to each of their homes through the chimney."

"Ho, ho, ho," says Claus. "But that is the only



tom purcell

• commentary

way I could leave each of them gifts."

"But he stole cookies, your honor!"

The judge rolls his eyes.

"Would the prosecution please bring forth more substantive charges," he says.

"Your honor," continues the prosecutor, "this allegedly charitable figure has been abusing elves for years. They work long hours without breaks and vacations. Mr. Claus is in violation of numerous federal workplace statutes. The elves are afraid to speak out for fear of reprisal from their boss."

"Ho, ho, ho," says Claus. "But we all work long hours at our North Pole location. We work to promote joy and happiness and to benefit all of mankind."

"If his abuse of the elves is not criminal enough," continues the prosecutor, "then consider his abuse of helpless animals. He chains them to a sleigh and drives them nonstop on a hellish journey around the world."

"Surely," says the judge, "the prosecution has more compelling charges that might hold up in this court."

"We certainly do," says the prosecutor, picking up more papers and presenting them to the judge. "We have additional sworn affidavits accusing Mr. Claus of stalking. He's been

watching people when they're sleeping. He knows when they're awake. He even knows if they've been bad or good."

"Oh, brother," says the judge.

"Your honor," says the prosecutor, "this fat man in the red suit may look harmless, but he has been soliciting children through the mail and the Internet. He keeps an exhaustive list and has been checking it twice. Then he lures the children to the mall, where he entices them to sit on his lap!"

The judge shakes his head.

"This man is a bad example for our children," continues the prosecutor. "He encourages obesity and the consumption of trans fat. He poisons the homes of millions with secondhand pipe smoke. He is a symbol of our close-minded past, your honor -- NOT our progressive, secular present."

"Is that all, counselor?" said the judge.

"There's one more thing, your honor. Mr. Claus is a sexist. He has no respect for women -- no women in management positions. What's worse, he was caught kissing one boy's mother. He routinely calls women demeaning names!"

The judge turns to Claus.

"How do you respond to these charges, Mr. Claus?"

"Ho, ho, ho."

"I rest my case," says the prosecutor.

Tom Purcell is a nationally syndicated humor columnist. For comments to Tom, please email him at Purcell@caglecartoons.com.

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com

Steve Haynes, President

Tom Betz, Editor

Pat Schiefen, Society Editor

Sharon Corcoran, Repoter

Ramona C. Sanders, Reporter

Jordie Mann, Jessica Corbin, Advertising Sales

Sheila Smith, Office Manager

Nor'west Press

Jim Bowker, General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Betty Morris, James Jackson

Lana Westfahl, Rebecca Foster, James Ornelas,

Amanda Campbell, Mike Jackson

nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(ntbetz@nwkansas.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkansas.com)

Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, July 4th and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

1932-2003

The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants

1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey

1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company

Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: <star-news@nw-kansas.com>.

