

from our viewpoint...

# Federal monitoring of web postings curtails free speech

Believe it or not, the Department of Homeland Security is scouring social media posts for the words, "social media."  
 Those are just two of 500 words on a recently released list of words the Homeland Security is monitoring for on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter as well as blogs and even comments on newspaper websites. The rationale is that terrorist groups may be using social media web sites to recruit or plan attacks.  
 That's all well and good, but Homeland Security has also been creating reports on posts that "reflect adversely on the U.S. government." The idea that the federal government is making reports on speech directed at it brings back shades of the old House Un-American Activities Committee and Sen. Joseph McCarthy's communist witch-hunts.

What is probably the most disturbing part of the whole thing is that it isn't actually government personnel doing the monitoring. No, the government is paying a private contractor, General Dynamics, to do the actual work.

The Electronic Privacy Information Center, a Washington D.C. research group, sued under the Freedom of Information Act to get the list. There are some obvious words on it like hostage, shots fired, explosion, nuclear threat, contamination and suicide bomber. But what about ice or delays.

Imagine, if you were simply commenting on a news story on the Goodland Star-News' Facebook page, say an industrial spill or a blackout, your post could get flagged by Homeland Security. Worse still if you were to post a four or five word complaint about your flight being delayed by a snowstorm, you'd get flagged.

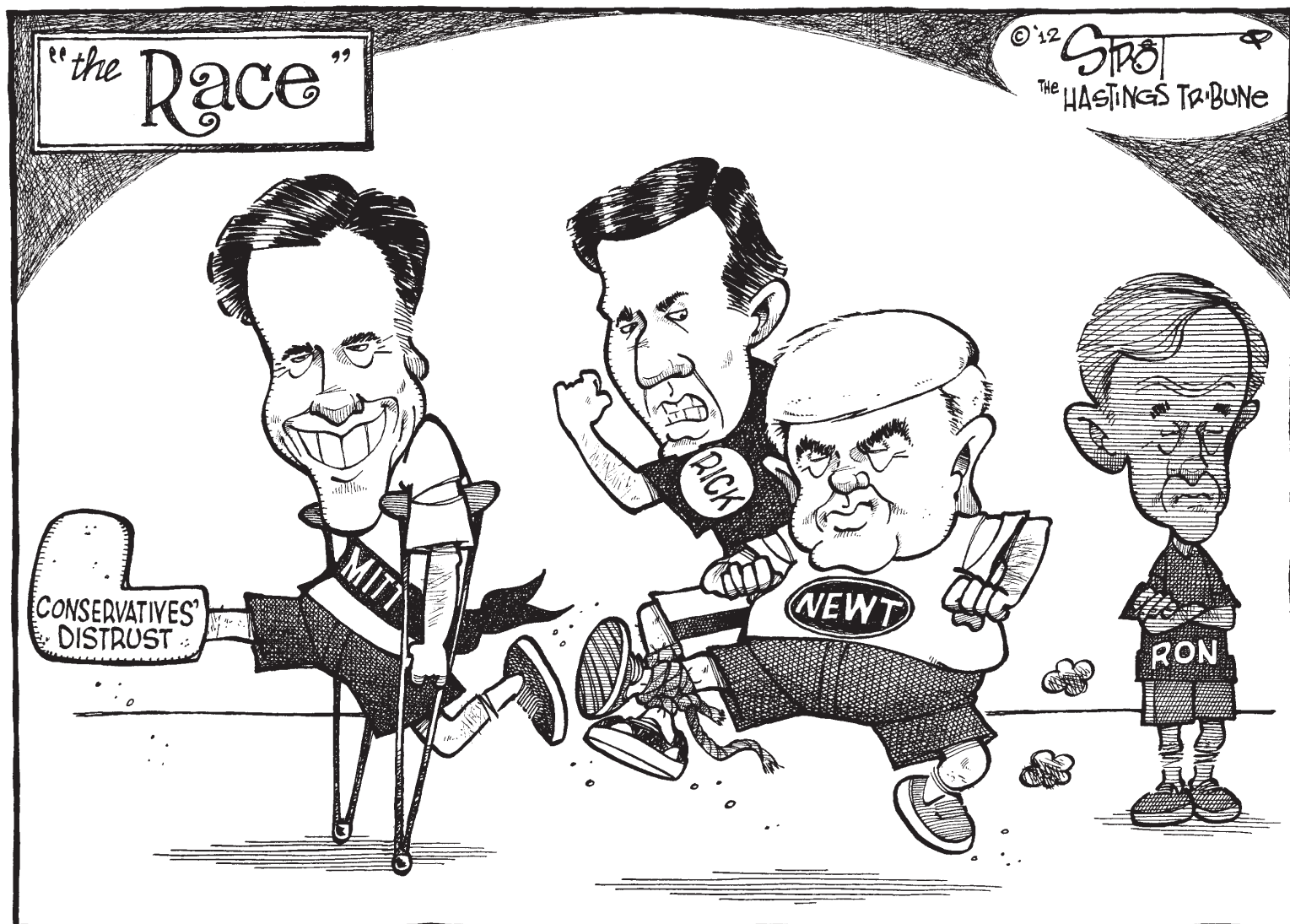
This isn't the only recent example of how public and private monitoring of social media has become a national worry.

We are rightly upset when companies like Google or Twitter want to share our personal web browsing habits with advertisers. Twitter is apparently selling old tweets without the posters' knowledge. There was a recent report of a man whose statement ended up in an online advertisement without his consent.

We are rightly upset when a school district punishes a girl for tweeting about a hall monitor on her own time, at her own house. We are rightly upset when the governor's office asks a school district to make a teenager apologize for a tweet.

In an age when personal information gets stolen from major companies on a monthly basis, when there are millions upon millions of security cameras, when police are considering filling the skies with unmanned drones to monitor our every move, we must take every opportunity to preserve personal freedom, especially the freedom to say whatever we want – about whatever we want – without fear of persecution.

We must tell our congressional representatives to exercise their oversight authority and stop the Department of Homeland Security from blanket monitoring of social media posts. —Kevin Bottrell



# What about the war in our backyard?

While the United States remains focused on Iran and Syria, the war next door drags on.

I refer to the drug wars that have convulsed Mexico during the past five years.

While Vice-President Joe Biden was meeting with Mexican leaders in Mexico City this past week, Juarez, Mexico, residents Manuel and Isabel Martinez were in Kansas visiting their daughter, a student at Kansas Wesleyan University. I found their observations on Mexico's plight on the eve of its upcoming July presidential election worth sharing.

Isabel, a hospital nurse, sees the violence first-hand. According to her and her husband, President Rafael Calderon's well-intentioned effort to rid the country of drug cartels is widely viewed as a failure. While violence has abated somewhat in Juarez itself, the war between the drug gangs has spread to other parts of the country.

Associated Press writer Olga Rodriguez cited statistics this week showing that nearly 50,000 people have been killed in drug violence during the first five years of the Calderon administration.

A key factor keeping the drug mafias in business has been the consistent demand from Mexico's northern neighbor. Most Mexicans see little hope of reigning in the cartels as long as the demand for their products remains strong in the United States.

Conservative American commentator Pat Buchanan once famously remarked that, "The problem with the (our own) war on drugs is that we have millions of Americans (i.e. the drug users) collaborating with the enemy."

And in fact Time magazine's July 2011 cover



## a voice of reason

• alan jilka

story entitled "The War Next Door" cites a figure of \$65 billion annually in reference to Americans' consumption of illegal drugs, a bigger business than all professional sports and Hollywood combined.

There has been a deluge of arms flooding into Mexico in recent years, mostly from the United States. When President Calderon spoke to a joint session of the U.S. Congress a couple years ago, he pleaded with lawmakers to reinstate the Assault Weapons Ban. His pleas fell on deaf ears. During his meeting with Mr. Biden, President Calderon again asked for help controlling the flow of weapons and drug money south across the border.

Amid such an environment, Manuel Martinez expects the ruling party of President Calderon (PAN) to lose the upcoming elections. Opposition (PRI) party candidate Enrique Peña Nieto assured the vice president that his government will be "committed to fighting organized crime." However, many say, they expect Mr. Martinez him to make accommodations with the drug cartels in an effort to end the violence.

The reasoning is that since the government has proven itself incapable of eliminating the corruption that has assisted the cartels, it should return to the old ways of payoffs that ensured a modicum of peace and tranquility.

The Mexican people have been traumatized by the daily violence and are ready to do whatever necessary to return safety to the streets, including unsavory compromises.

To ultimately end the drug wars, Mr. Martinez has become convinced that the U.S. needs to help its neighbor by decriminalizing drugs. His reasoning is simple: Criminalization of drugs has been a huge failure, just like prohibition of alcohol before it. For Mexicans, the proof is direct – the body count. All drugs, may feel, should be legalized, taxed and regulated like another, alcohol, already is.

The United States government has given our southern neighbor as much material assistance as the highly nationalistic Mexicans will accept. But by and large, this war remains an "out of sight out of mind" conflict for most Americans. As long as the violence stays south of the Rio Grande, that attitude likely won't change.

But Mr. Martinez thinks the violence will inevitably spill across the border. The United States provides the demand and huge profit motive for the narco-traffickers.

Although to date Mexico has borne the brunt of the human toll, Americans too are being victimized by the cartels. Maybe we need to get engaged in the search for another solution before it's too late.

Alan Jilka of Salina is vice president of Jilka Furniture, former mayor of Salina and a one-time Democratic candidate for Congress in the Kansas 1st District.

# Education reform going in wrong direction

It was illegal. It was my first year of teaching in rural Kentucky – 1969. And rookie teachers got bus duty. Everyday when the last bell rang, I went out patrolling so big kids did not cut in line, crowding out the little kids along the bus loading lot.

Campbell County Kentucky had nearly all rural kids but Kentucky only funded a set percentage for busing. Thus, my school was desperately short on buses. Sixty-passenger buses loaded up with 90+ kids. When seats filled up, they stood in the aisle. And those kids who got off first waited to load last in the door well – way in front of the yellow line that was labeled "do not stand beyond this line."

County police, in plain sight of this disaster, directed those desperately overloaded buses onto the highway. This was so illegal. But what could a school administrator or the police do? The crime was at the state level: failure to fund educational costs enough to keep their children's school buses legal.

Today, Campbell County is a bedroom community to Cincinnati and I have no doubt that my old school is compliant.

But the proposed education reform package appears to be loaded with similar treat-all-schools-the-same policies that will press many Kansas schools into diverting funds to cover their higher transportation costs. Other schools such as Dodge City with over 75 percent of students speaking English as a second language, and Wichita-Topeka-Kansas City schools with more "at risk" students will also have to divert



## education frontlines

• John Schrock

regular base aid to serve their students, leaving their average student population poorer.

There are two factors at play: adequacy of funding and equity of funding. Kansas schools were moving toward adequate funding before the 2007 downturn pushed levels back to the 1990 levels. But our current formula passed the Kansas Supreme Court test for equity and limited the discrepancy between the rich and poor districts.

The proposed education reform package appears to be a rich-get-richer and poor-get-poorer package, locking in less-than-adequate funding for the schools serving high-need students, but making the sky the limit for the rich districts.

For those who remember "It's a Wonderful Life," you will recognize the dilemma. Those serving high-need students under the current

formula are like Jimmy Stewart's character standing up on his savings-and-loan counter, pointing out that the money is invested in each person's home – or in our case, children.

But we are apparently in an era where Mr. Potter the banker is in ascendency. Recall the desolation of that Christmas future. The Dickensian philosophy of Mr. Potter in "Wonderful Life" – that every dollar spent by schools is a dollar not invested in business – is precisely the party line being heard from the anti-education lobby.

And apparently the governor is listening to the Mr. Potters and Ebenezer Scrooges.

If the Legislature does not reject this proposal, the courts likely will. The adequacy of funding is still on schedule for court. And if the local-option budget lid gets lifted, there is great likelihood that the equity of funding will also be challenged.

The current school funding formula is not broken.

But perhaps, as a trainer of Kansas teachers, I had better begin training my student teachers how to overload school buses.

## where to write

**U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; E-mail address – <http://roberts.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=EmailPat>

**U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, Russell Senate Office Building, Courtyard 4, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521; Fax (202) 228-6966. E-mail address – <http://moran.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/e-mail-jerry>

**U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 1st Congressional District, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington D.C., 20575-1601. (202-225-2715) E-mail address – <https://huelskamp.house.gov/contact-me/email-me>

**State Rep. Rick Billinger**, Docking State Office Building Rm 724, Topeka, KS 66612. Phone (785) 296-7659, cell (785) 899-4770, home (785) 899-5824. E-mail [rick.billinger@house.ks.gov](mailto:rick.billinger@house.ks.gov).

**State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, Rm. 225-E, 300 SW 10th, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785-296-7399; e-mail address – [ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us](mailto:ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us)

**Kansas Attorney General**, 301 S.W. 10th, Lower Level, Topeka, KS 66612-1597 (785) 296-3751 Fax (785) 291-3699 TTY: (785) 291-3767

## 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](mailto:star.news@nwkansas.com)

Steve Haynes, President  
 Kevin Bottrell, Editor  
 Pat Schiefen, Society Editor  
 Advertising Department  
 Jessica Corbin and Jeff Dreiling  
 Sheila Smith, Circulation Manager



### Nor'west Press

Richard Westfahl, General Manager

Jim Bowker, James Jackson,

Lana Westfahl, Kris McCool, Stacy Brashear, Tracy Traxel,

Gary Meyer, Judy McKnight



[nwkansas.com](http://nwkansas.com)

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

([nt.betz@nwkansas.com](mailto:nt.betz@nwkansas.com))

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. ([support@nwkansas.com](mailto:support@nwkansas.com))

Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving 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](mailto:star-news@nwkansas.com). Advertising questions can be sent to: [goodlandads@nwkansas.com](mailto: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 and letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive will be rejected. 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@nwkansas.com](mailto:star.news@nwkansas.com).