THE OBERLIN HERALD —

Opinion Page

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Should government define people's right to privacy?

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*

Red luggage draws attention

Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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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 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 a

nd guide came to my rescue. I could take the bag with me. I just had to have a sticker saying it was oversize, 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 Ko

ng 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.

Distant grandkids grow fast

Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplotts@nwkansas.com

Patient update: Jim (and his finger) are both doing well. As you might expect, he removed his own stitches sans any antiseptic. I imagine he just used his utility knife.

At least I didn't have to watch.

-ob-

Saturday night, we helped host an appreciation dinner to thank everyone who sponsored members of our mission team to Mexico. We served burritos smothered in a green-chili gravy, Spanish rice, refried beans and Texas sheet cake. After dinner, we showed pictures of the trip and answered questions.

It was sure fun to see our teammates again. Everyone was able to attend except for two young men who live out of the area – and we were thinking of them.

We're already signing up people for next October's trip. Start thinking about it. You would love it.

-ob-

Had a long phone visit with our daughter Jennifer, who lives in San Antonio, Texas. She has the 1-year-old.

Jennifer said they have been trying to get little Ani to say, "Whoooo-doggie." But all Ani gets out is, "Whooo-duh." It's so cute to hear her little voice go, "Whooo-duh."

And, Jennifer said when she put the phone to Ani's ear so I could "talk" to her, Ani kissed the receiver.

Oh, my! It makes this grandma cry. We are just too far away.

All our grandkids are growing up so fast. We have a granddaughter who is almost 17.

-ob-

Speaking of birthdays, I can't fail to mention that this week my oldest daughter, Halley, will celebrate her 40th. Now, how can I possibly have a child who is 40 years old? She was in high school just last week, wasn't she?

Twenty years ago on her birthday, I said to her, "Just think, honey, in 20 years you'll be as old as I am now, but I'll only be 60."

She could easily imagine her then-40-year-old mother being 60. But no way, at age 20, could she imagine herself being 40.

And now, here it is. Where did the time go?

It is so true: "The older you get, the faster time goes."

I'm afraid I'll turn around and be 80 and still won't have everything done I want to accomplish in this life.

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Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

From its earliest beginning, the Daughters of the American Revolution have been committed to honoring and supporting our armed forces in times of war and in times of peace.

Our Project Patriot Committee encourages chapters to honor and support our active military personnel.

We are all proud of the fact that over the last few years, since adopting the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, the generosity of our members has enabled the National Society to send 25,000 60-minute phone cards, almost $40,000 worth of shoes and clothing items, as well as donations amounting to $40,000 for projects supporting the soldiers wounded in the war in Iraq.

"God, Home and Country" is our motto.

Eva Lee Wheeler, secretary
John Athey Chapter, Oakley

Quake could damage dam

To the Editor:

"The main causes of problems are solutions." Tuttle Creek dam is an example of a solution that has become a problem.

After the 1951 flood, some people with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers convinced politicians that building Tuttle Creek Dam would be the solution.

Residents who lived above the dam tried to prevent the dam from being built and one of the arguments they presented was that there had been earthquakes in the area and it would be dangerous to build a dam close to a fault line.

Congress ignored their concerns and the dam was built.

Now, some 40 years later, the Corps has decided that the dam was not designed and built to withstand the effects of an earthquake and they are spending $100 million to try and fix it.

How could smart, educated people have done something this dumb?

Tuttle Creek Dam is 12 miles west of the Humbolt fault line that goes from Oklahoma City to Omaha. One of the Corps experts said that "relatively minor faults could exist beneath (or very near) the site."

If that proves to be true, then there is a possibility that the weight of the water in the reservoir could cause an earthquake that otherwise might not have happened.

There is the danger that it might cause a rupture of the floor under the reservoir and under the dam.

There was a minor earthquake in 1993, but will we be as lucky the next time? It might be wise not to tempt fate too often.

The safest way to control water is to start at the top of the watershed.

We are playing a dangerous game trying to control it at the bottom with one big dam and we may live to really regret it.

We may be putting thousands of people at risk.

In the fifties, there were bumper stickers that read "Big Dam Foolishness."

Now we should have bumper stickers that read "Big Dam Dilemma."

Lloyd D. Wiersma
Wamego

Voter wants Bush veto overridden

To the Editor:

Protecting cronies again? It's now evident that youth health has a lower presidential priority.

With elections fast approaching, please "eject" members from Congress who refuse to override President Bush's recent veto of the children's health care legislation.

Also, eject replacements who accept campaign donations from lobbyists, political action committees and unrestrained corporat chief executives.

John Bauer
Martinez, Calif.

Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by e-mail to oberlinherald@nwkansas.com.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should

be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on priv

ate individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

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