

Does government really shield people's privacy?

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 HIPPA. 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.

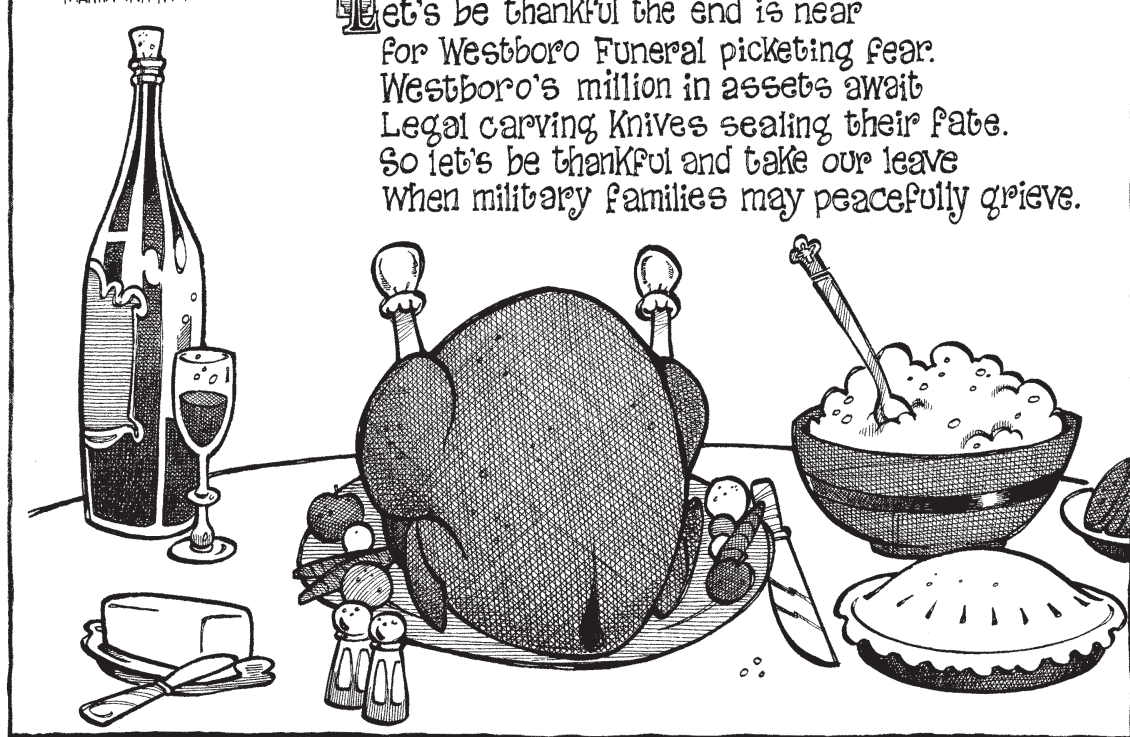
Now, it's the fire department. In New York, Homeland Security is training firemen to look for terrorists as they go about their duties inspecting buildings and the like. Firemen get into places without a warrant that now law enforcement officers can't reach. Now, they'll be reporting on citizens, too.

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

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THE MANHATTAN MERCURY



Let's be thankful the end is near
for Westboro Funeral picketing fear.
Westboro's million in assets await
Legal carving Knives sealing their fate.
So let's be thankful and take our leave
When military families may peacefully grieve.

Guide's tale shows war's toll



Along the Sappan

By Steve Haynes
s.haynes@nwkansan.com

People ask me to name the best part of our trip to Vietnam, but it wasn't teeming Saigon, or the beautiful countryside, not even the "Hanoi Hilton," the old French prison where American fliers were held during the war.

Hanoi, with its old French colonial heart and wondrous lakes, is a beautiful city. But as usual, it's a people story that makes things interesting.

For me, it was Lam, our guide in Saigon.

After a couple of days of Lam explaining the sights of Saigon and the history of the "American War," someone asked what it was like for the losing side, the non-Communists, after the Americans left, and Lam started talking about his mother's family.

Lam told us that, until a couple of years ago, the children of good Communists got a few points added to their test scores. Usually, that was enough to get them into college and often, to keep the others out.

He said he felt lucky to have gone to college and have a good job, since his family had been on the losing side. Had he been born a few years earlier, he said, he might not have made it, but things are changing.

Most of his mother's family sympathized with the non-Communist southern government after the French pulled out of Vietnam in 1954, he said. The oldest sister ran away from home at age 16 to join the Communists. Her three brothers joined the South Vietnamese army, while his mother married a southerner who went to college and taught history at a high school.

All did well on their chosen paths. His aunt eventually became a colonel in the Communist army, her husband a general.

His non-Communist uncles became officers, too, one a major general, one a colonel and one a major. His parents taught, his father a professor at the high school, his mother at a junior high.

When the war ended, all elected to stay in their homeland though many people were leaving. The



OUR GUIDE, Lam, explained a map of Viet Cong tunnels. — Herald staff photo

Communists sent the uncles and his father to "re-education" camps for "reactionary elements." The length of their terms depended on their political progress and the depth of their involvement with the losing side.

The army officers had to spend up to seven years in the labor camps, living Lam said, under cruel conditions with little food. His father was released fairly soon, but of course, the general had a longer stay.

His aunt and her husband could not help them, he said, because that would have caused them to lose face with their fellow Communists.

While the men were in the camps — "They were really concentration camps," Lam said — two of their wives fled to America with other men. Eventually, though, they earned their release. As it became easier to leave Vietnam, all moved to the United States.

His parents stayed. His mother could still teach, he said, since her job at the junior high was considered less political. His father applied for jobs time and time again. Each time, he was told, "Never."

The family was forced out of their house and had to settle in a smaller place. On his mother's pay, they got by.

His father? He wound up selling lottery tickets on the curb in Saigon, about the lowest job a former teacher might sink to.

Now, Lam said, his parents are retired and his father has accepted his fate, relaxed and begun to enjoy his old age.

Family gatherings, though, were strained for years. All the children would come home for holidays, he said, but there was not much for the rest to say to his aunt and her husband.

Today, most people in Vietnam have no memory of the war, he told us, and things are better. Still, the Communists get the best jobs and the most honors.

Would he ever join the party to better himself?

"Never!" Lam said.

Many families could tell similar stories, I'm sure. Many in this country might have told one like it 150 years ago. But for an American used to free and open competition in life and society, it's a sobering tale, one that makes you realize how much we have to be thankful for, no matter what our country's faults

Table groans with heavy load

I guess I don't know when to quit.

When I start cooking for a holiday meal, I go a little crazy. Flipping through my recipe box, I keep finding things that sound so-o-o good, I can't help myself.

Two or three vegetables, two salads, two desserts, relishes, deviled eggs, four dozen rolls, all in addition to the traditional turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy. We'll have leftovers for a week.

My friend Tranda calls them "planned-overs."

We were thankful for the beautiful day, since it had snowed the day before. We were thankful for the company of my brother Bob and his friend Nadine; for Jim's dad being able to spend the day with us; and for dear friends Lee and Lora to join us.

In the great scope of things, it is our friends and family who are important. Material things may come and go, but the people in our lives are our treasures.

The older I get, the more frequent my "senior moments" become.

Recently, I treated myself to a new battery-operated toothbrush, but I still catch myself vigorously moving the brush up and down.

I'm getting to be like the guy who



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplots@nwkansan.com

was asked if he ever thought about the "hereafter."

"Sure do," he said. "Every time I go into a room, I wonder, 'What am I here after?'"

—ob—

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Houses all over town are already decked out. Jim has been to the basement, hauling up the boxes of lights and checking them over.

Most men don't like to hang Christmas lights. Jim is the exception — he loves to put up lights. It's an art form to him. He gets so creative.

One year, he created a truck and an auger out of lights, another year it was a triplane and airport, yet another year a train. He's made a house and a helicopter, all three dimensional, out of lights.

His motto is: "I put up lights until one of two things happens: I run out of lights, or it's Christmas Day."

Since he buys all the discounted

lights in the days following Christmas, we'll never run out of lights. And I have seen him putting up lights Christmas Eve. I think if it stands still, he'll put lights on it.

—ob—

My daughter Kara called Thanksgiving Day to tell me that Taylor's school wants to test her for advanced classes in math and reading.

"Well, it's about time," I said. "Now they'll know she's as smart as I've always said she is."



From the Bible

Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.
Philippians 4:4

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Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800

E-mail: oberlinherald@nwkansan.com

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To the Editor:

November is American Diabetes Month. As a diabetic and a friend of the American Diabetes Association, I will give some of their information I have received.

This month promotes awareness of the symptoms and serious complications of this disease. There are strategies for helping to prevent complications of Type 2 diabetes, which include blindness, kidney disease, nerve damage, amputation or heart disease.

The American Diabetic Association has come a long way in the last 30 years. At first, it did not have any of the specialized tests to help assess patients for the control of blood sugar levels.

Now we know that type 2 diabetes, which is more common, can be prevented or delayed if the patient will take time to lose some weight and do exercises their doctor recommends.

The Salvation Army Service Unit in Decatur County is dedicated to meeting the needs of residents in your county throughout the entire year.

We invite everyone to join us in this effort to ensure that the disadvantaged of your community receive the assistance they need. We

Letters to the Editor

If you are unable to exercise for 30 minutes five days a week, then do what you can, and hopefully in time you will be able to do more.

Glucose monitors help control diabetes by checking your blood sugar at least three or four times daily. This way, the blood sugars can be monitored in case you need extra insulin or oral diabetic drugs.

Research continues and now there is insulin that can be inhaled, although other anti diabetic drugs are still necessary.

It is hard to believe that some 21 million Americans have diabetes. Every 21 seconds someone else is diagnosed with this disease.

As a diabetic, I think of the ABCs. These would be:

A - for the A1C test, which should be done at least once or twice a year,

more if your doctor advises. This test tells a doctor what your blood sugars are doing and the control you maintained the last three months.

B - is for blood pressure; checking your blood pressure often to keep it in control. A good blood pressure is below 120 systolic (the upper number), and in the 70-80 range for the diastolic (the lower number).

C - is for checking your cholesterol. Keeping your cholesterol under control, together with good blood pressure control, may prevent a heart attack or stroke.

Your health, as a diabetic, depends on how much importance you give to caring for yourself, with the help of your doctor.

The more knowledge you have, the better your control.

Elsie Wolters, Oberlin

Salvation Army needs your help

To the Editor:

For over 100 years, the Salvation Army around the world has been linked to the Christmas season and to compassion for the needy.

The Salvation Army Service Unit in Decatur County is dedicated to meeting the needs of residents in your county throughout the entire year.

We invite everyone to join us in this effort to ensure that the disadvantaged of your community receive the assistance they need. We

are counting on your support.

In last week's newspaper was an envelope with the Salvation Army shield on it. We encourage you to support us by sending your gift to the Salvation Army volunteer or volunteer agency on the outside of the envelope.

The money raised through these inserts will help residents in your town or county by providing emergency assistance with utilities, rent, prescriptions, food and clothing.

In most Kansas towns, you will

also see our red kettles outside a department or grocery store. We hope you will support our bell ringers as they stand in the cold, volunteering their time to raise money for a great cause.

The services we provide are only possible because of your generosity.

Brian Carroll
Service Extension Director
The Salvation Army
Kansas and Western Missouri
Division
Kansas City, Mo.