

Power of secret court larger than we realize

The revelations continue about the government's secret surveillance system and the vast expansion of federal power it implies, all supervised by closed-door congressional committees and a federal court that meets — and decides — in secret.

Of course, we're assured that we have no reason to fear this system or the court that supervises it. The powers granted the government by the Patriot Act — a dangerous law with an Orwellian name — and later additions are to be used only against foreign enemies of the government.

Officials from the president down promise that only foreign intelligence targets, some of them perhaps operating within the U.S. and some of them even "U.S. persons," come under the microscope of the security net.

Not the rest of us. Having seen how easily the Internal Revenue Service, the supposedly incorruptible tax collector, can be subverted for political purposes, however, can we believe the promises of our government?

How much of a stretch is it from fighting the enemies of our government to fighting the enemies of those who happen to be running that government at any given time?

How far does the security apparatus have to bend to use these new-found powers against domestic enemies of the government?

In fact, the Patriot Act and allied laws already are used to track domestic crimes, including money laundering and tax evasion. These laws affect not just terrorists, but everyday Americans who want to open a savings account at their bank or fly on an airplane or use cash to buy something.

It's virtually illegal today to use large amounts of cash. The law presupposed that you must be doing something shady. You

have to prove the opposite if the government asks, and they'll keep your cash for you meantime.

It's not just the intelligence agencies that want these powers. The tax collectors want them. The drug cops want them. All law enforcement would like to have these powers.

And if they would be used only against the bad guys, why then, who cares?

History shows that might not always be the case. Powers taken by the government tend to be used for the government's purpose, and eventually, that becomes the preservation of the government. It's but a short slide down this slippery slope to something very different.

Our country has always held the dark forces of government at bay. Now, in the name of fighting terrorists, they stand ready to take the reins.

The very thought of a secret court, making thousands of secret rulings every year, building a body of law no one ever sees, is frightening. The thought of where this could lead, more so.

The intelligence court, comprising 25 federal judges from around the country chosen by the chief justice, and meeting in a secure room at the federal courthouse in Washington, surely must be defending our rights today, despite all the snooping into phone and Internet records.

But how will we know that? And how will we know next year or the year after what has followed, when everything is done in secret?

Are the terrorists, in the end, the real threat? Will we even know when the line is crossed?

As we celebrate our nation's two centuries plus of independence, it's about time this box was opened. — *Steve Haynes*



Not fine, but still a lot better

My doctor will be so proud of me.

Five weeks ago, I was in a hospital bed getting blood because my red-cell count had bottomed out. On the Fourth of July, I was dancing at almost 9,000 feet elevation.

I'm not saying I was dancing the Cotton-Eyed Joe or that I danced for long, just two or three dances, a couple of slow ones, swing dancing to a fast tune. And sit down. But I was upright and gliding across the floor in Steve's arms at the old Elks Lodge in Creede, Colo.

In between my hospital stay and my stint on the dance floor, I did two things. I stopped taking an over-the-counter pain medication I had been taking for a long time for an elbow problem and I had a small operation to remove the source of my bleeding.

Those two things, both of which I should have done a long time ago, probably saved my life. That, and a visit to the doctor because I was feeling so weak and my head felt like there was a windmill up there pounding away.

I've never been sick much, and it took a bit to prompt me to go see the doctor, but he and the surgeon fixed me up, and I've been on rehab for the last month or so.

We had been planning to go to Creede the day after I got slapped in the hospital and pumped full of



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
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new blood.

Every time we come out here, however, it takes most of week to get used to the altitude, and the first few days we're pretty sluggish.

I realized that even with the normal red-cell count, there isn't enough oxygen up here to make me feel good for the first few days. With a low count like I had last month, I would probably just get altitude sick and end up in the emergency room.

So that trip was canceled. But last week, I was feeling good. My blood count wasn't quite up to normal, but it was close. If I just relaxed and didn't try to do too much, I figured, I'd be fine.

Besides, we really needed to get out to see what the fires, which are still burning, had done to the area.

All our friends were OK, and so far, no houses have been lost. I took it easy for most of a week. We took gentle walks and finally, the last two days, we went on some easy

trail hikes.

But what do you say to your friends when they greet you with, "Hey, long time no see. How're you doing?"

Well, you lie, of course. "Great. Fine. Good to see you too."

And then, one day, it really isn't a lie at all.

From the Bible

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house."

— Mark 6:3-4

Wet closet not welcome event

This is not the week for something to go wrong. But, of course, that's exactly what happened.

My BFF (that's Best Friend Forever, for those of you without teenage grandchildren) from high school is coming for a quick visit and I am hostess for my ladies club. And this was to be the week to clean corners, wash windows and scrub floors.

A month ago, I told Jim, "Now, I'm having Liberty-Star in July, so you know there are a few things I want done. OK?"

He dutifully answered, "OK." I began to enumerate my list of "Honey-dos." Heading it was to finish the soffit on the front porch and remove the scaffolding, baseboards in the kitchen would be nice and finish grouting the new backsplash. Those were the major items. Cornice boxes for the two guest bedroom windows would just be an added bonus.

You can imagine how thrilled I was to see the porch project almost completed. I had my cleaning schedule lined up for the inside. Looking good. I was going to be ready for club and company. Then — disaster struck.

I was hanging some clothes in the closet when I went to move something on the rod behind the door. Squish! I had stepped in something wet and cold. The cats haven't



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
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been in the house for months, so I couldn't blame them. It was water. Definitely water. The carpet was soaked. A box of old white sheets on the floor was, too. The deeper I dug, the worse it got. Soon, everything in the closet was either in the adjoining utility room or draped over a chair in the living room.

Jim found the culprit. A pinhole in the water line going to the outside faucet on the north side of the house had been leaking for who knows how long. It had probably happened during winter. It didn't leak until I turned on the faucet. With all the watering this spring and summer, it just got worse and worse. He fixed it, but now what?

It's two days before my friend, who has never been to my house, and before club meeting. My house is upside down. Carpet has been pulled from the closet, shoes and shoe racks litter the front room, clothes are everywhere. The sheets

have been laundered and folded. The closet floor is dry, but the damaged sheetrock still has to come out.

A thorough closet purging has been on my personal "to-do" list for a couple of years. But I had in mind a lengthy winter project when I couldn't get outside. Not a crisis-management event.

Well, it is what it is. And IT has to be cleaned up. The house will get what my mother called "a lick and a promise." If it gets done, fine. If not, it's still fine. My club friends won't care; we'll still laugh and talk and have a grand time. My friend Galene won't care. Good grief! We lived together in college. She's seen lots worse.

I just have to remember to take the advice I always give others when faced with a daunting task. I ask, "How do you eat an elephant?"

Answer, "One bite at a time."

Fire fighters dig in for a war

Living around a big forest fire, you develop a sense of routine — most of the time.

Fighting one of these fires is more like a military campaign than the skirmishes city or rural firemen face day in and day out. With 1,500 fire fighters and dozens of crews, it takes organized command and control.

Federal agencies fight big fires through an interagency system. Fire crews, flight crews, command teams all stand ready for call as a unit. We've seen rigs from the Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and smaller agencies, such as the Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages National Wildlife Refuges.

Three helicopters are based at the Creede airport, less than a mile from our home. Two are red fire-fighting lifters that specialize in towing buckets of water or fire retardant. They come and go for fuel from early morning to near dusk, assuming the weather is OK for flying.

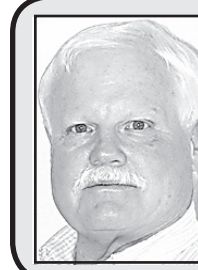
A bright orange rig appears to run errands and take officials out to the fire. It's not a fire-fighting unit as such. All three have fuel and parts trucks, pilots and ground crews. The red lifters aren't that big, but they have dual main rotors. It's fascinating how they can mesh without hitting each other, mounted as they are only a couple of feet apart over the cab.

The lifters come in dragging an empty fabric bucket, set it down on the apron, then land for fuel. Pilots have to take lunch breaks, of course, and between trips to the airport, they fill and dump the bucket several times. Lift is better in the morning, when the air is cool and dense, and some times winds or storms keep this air force on the ground.

Meantime, fire crews parade up and down the county road to the south, which bypasses the town. After a couple of weeks, the overall crew peaked and individual federal crews and fire companies began to rotate home.

Reporter lauds replacement at *The Herald*

I just wanted to write and tell you how much I have been enjoying the stories written by your new reporter, Ramell Taylor. He is informative, to the point and unbiased — all important qualities in a good reporter. He is also a talented photographer.



Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*
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One Forest Service worker said he'd been retired for seven years, but keeps himself available for fire duty. Last year, he said, he worked 77 days all over the West and took the entire month of July off.

After two weeks, crews are supposed to go home. A worker can stay for another week, he said, but after that, you have to take some days off. The next call likely will be to another fire.

For the last 20 years, the federal agencies have worked under joint interagency command, calling in fire crews, aircraft, command teams and all manner of specialists from across the country as needed. Everyone works together and the system is run along military lines, the Forest Service man noted.

With better weather and a little rain last week, the fire behaved better — most days. Last Monday, it took a four-mile "run" to the south, driven through wilderness studded with standing dead spruce trees. Another, similar run Wednesday carried it yet farther into the wilderness, driven by a 20 mph north wind.

With a wind behind it, the fire explodes into a storm. The smoke and debris above it topped out above the afternoon thunderstorms, an angry, boiling cloud of rolling fire and smoke that could be seen for miles, reaching 20,000 to 30,000 feet.

The next day, all was quiet, with the fire settling back to individual hot spots. It was miles from the town of Creede and from our house, but with a fire of this size, that can be a comfortable illusion.

Just a couple of blocks to the

south, across the river at the edge of the timber, fire crews cut trees, cleared brush, erected sprinklers and ran hose lines around a group of houses backed up to the forest.

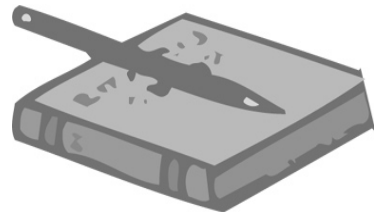
They were prepared in case the fire made a run back to the north. The blaze is 10 to 12 miles away, but the sight of those hose lines is sobering.

So far, though, the crews have kept the fire away from houses and lodges. The only confirmed structure damage came with the loss of a pump house at a guest ranch belonging to friends of ours. With their cabins safe, they felt lucky to have lost only that.

But literally, the forest around them will never be the same. It will become an interesting place in its own right — a fascinating post-fire habitat — but the "old growth" forest is gone.

In the U.S.A.

"You can't get rid of poverty by giving people money."
P.J. O'Rourke
American humorist



Letter to the Editor

Having had the privilege of working for your wonderful newspaper, it is a delight to see such a talented young

man take my place. Keep up the good work. Stephanie DeCamp, Kansas City

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