

Privacy takes another hit as police track license tags

A nationwide study by the American Civil Liberties Union reveals that the cops know just not whether you've been naughty or nice — but where you've been doing it.

Agencies, mostly city and county departments, are using license-tag scanners, cameras programmed to record licenses and their location, all day and all night. Located on a patrol car, on bridges or buildings, anywhere they can "see" traffic, these cameras are remarkably efficient.

Minneapolis, with just eight units, captured 4.9 million locations in the first eight months of last year. They got the mayor's car 41 times. At first, police treated the database as a public record. Anyone could come ask for a report on any tag. Later, they decided the information was "classified."

As more and more cameras appear, more agencies join the movement, more vehicles are logged, the information increasingly goes into regional data bases that can produce a remarkably detailed picture of our daily activities.

It is, the union says, "a single high-resolution image of our lives."

"There's just a fundamental question of whether we're going to live in a society where these dragnet surveillance systems become routine," said Catherine Crump, a staff lawyer with the organization.

The group says it wants police departments to delete information on all vehicles except those actually linked to a crime, but of course, that's part of the beauty of the system. Your car

might not be linked to a crime today, but who knows when someone might want to know where you've been?

People have no expectation of privacy when driving or parked on a public street, one police official noted. And that's true enough. Departments have checked licenses and logged locations for years, but until now, it was a low-efficiency game.

And true enough, we're all tracking ourselves by carrying cell phones, global positioning devices and other electronic gear. We walk on streets surveilled by cameras and pass through security at the airport.

The question the study asks is, "Do we really need Big Brother watching our every move?"

Some will say, if you're not doing anything wrong, why worry? The government will reassure us that we have nothing to fear, the scanners are only to track the bad guys. But they said that about the Internal Revenue Service.

In our view, no agency needs to gather and store this kind of information. Government agencies of all types already have way too much data stored away on citizens already. And it's not just an innocent system designed to catch bad guys.

Information is power, and when "they" have enough, it could come to the point where the citizens are no longer in charge.

No one should have that kind of power. As citizens, we need to take a stand now, before it's too late.

— Steve Haynes

Time to show mutual respect

It's time for both sides in the pool fight to turn down the volume.

Both sides have legitimate arguments. Neither should denigrate the other.

Pool supporters have made their case many times on the need for a new pool. Voters agreed by a 2-1 margin. We feel they will agree again if asked.

Pool opponents need to

have more respect for those who want a pool. It's a legitimate need, a long-time city service. Most surrounding towns have or are building new pools. Oberlin voters agreed to the point that they passed a 1.5 cent sales tax to pay for ours. That's no small commitment.

Supporters need to realize that those passing petitions or talking against the pool are

exercising their rights, too. It's a legitimate thing to be concerned with the amount of debt the city takes on.

In any political battle like this, both sides need to show mutual respect. Both are trying to do what they think best for our town. Vilifying the other side won't make anyone happy — or be good for the town.

— Steve Haynes

Is the petition just sour grapes?

To the Editor:
I just pulled the July 10 *Oberlin Herald* out of my mail box and read the story about the petition to stop the pool project.

I don't understand. Seems to me there was a referendum that approved issuing bonds to finance the project. Is the petition just sour grapes, mean-spirited posturing or a personal vendetta? Could be any of those or more I guess.

I don't live in Oberlin, but I did for the first 18 years of my life, and I can't understand why anyone would be opposed to a new pool. Various consultants have said the condition of the existing pool is beyond the point where repairs are a reasonable and feasible expense. Seems to me a new pool is the only solution.

The existing pool's and a new pool's value can't be evaluated on just a monetary basis. The people, and especially the youngsters in Oberlin, deserve and need a new

pool, and its corresponding physical, social and intrinsic benefits. I am not in favor of spending money needlessly or foolishly, but I don't think a new pool fits that category.

My home now is in Granby, Conn., a town of 10,000 people without a public pool. If you want to swim, you have to join the YMCA. That cost is more than what my tax increase would have been if we had built a proposed pool in Granby.

Our alternatives are a mud hole (pond) in Salmon Brook Park or one of the local lakes. They don't provide the ability to hold meets or races, though, and Oberlin doesn't have those alternatives. We Granby residents got it wrong when we voted down a public pool.

I certainly hope my fellow Oberlinites get it right and build a new

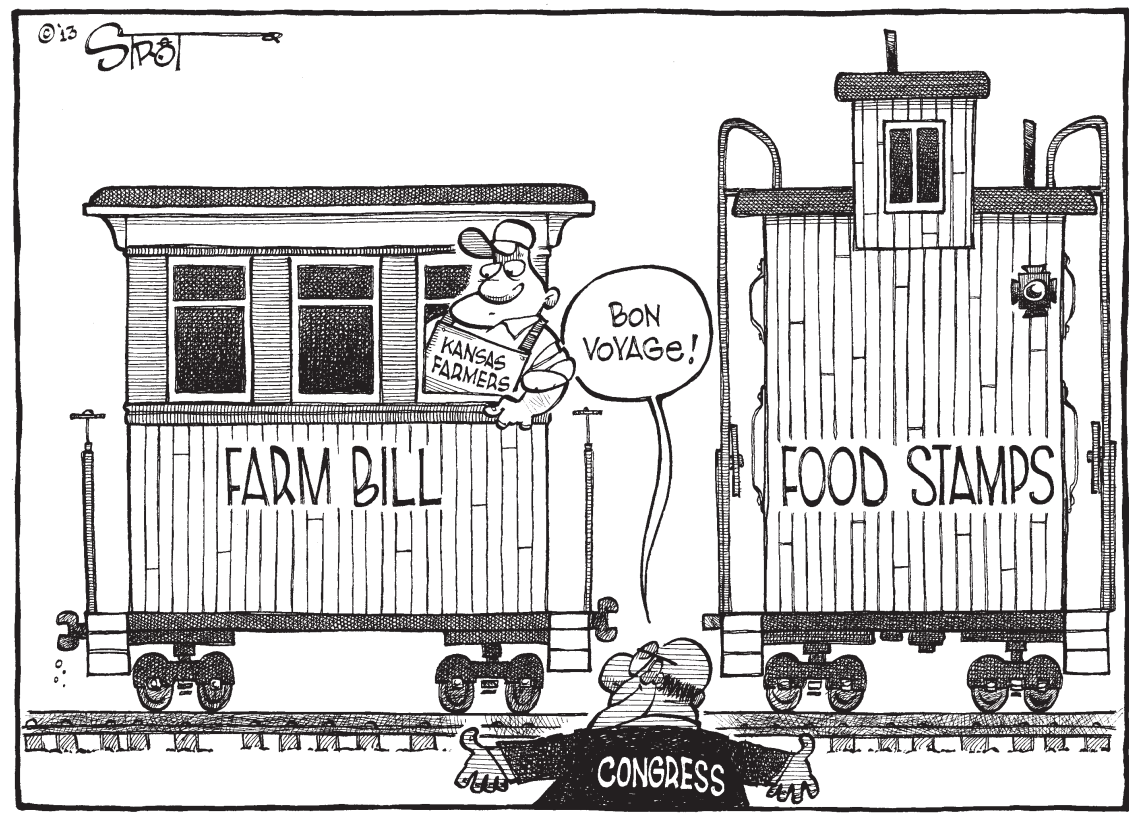
pool. I have lots of great memories of the Oberlin pool, and Rusty and Jerry and Sharon, and all my friends who were there almost every day in the summer. The youngsters especially, but really everyone, should be able to have the opportunity to share my experiences.

Yes, the monetary cost is high, but there is a value in the new pool that can't be measured in dollars. I know the old pool saved my parents a lot of babysitting money, and they were confident in the safety and security at the pool.

A new pool will be a great benefit for the whole town. Please don't deny Oberlin this opportunity to continue a valuable tradition.

Barry K. Avery
North Granby, Conn.

Letter to the Editor



Couple says bye to family pet

We haven't hung a black wreath on the door, covered the mirrors or donned black armbands, but we are mourning the loss of one of our cats. "Sissy," so named because she was a sister to "Sammy the Siamese," was killed by a wayward dog.

After booting all three of the cats, Sissy, Missy and Bootsie, to the outdoors, we feared one of them would be hit by a passing car. All three seemed to like "dirt baths" in the middle of the street. We don't have many unleashed dogs in the neighborhood and cats can usually escape up a tree.

What made it worse, the guilty dog is being kept by son, James, and his wife, Charlotte, as a favor to its owner, her son Sean, while he finishes school. The kids felt so bad when they came to tell us what happened. They knew how much Jim loved that cat. It wasn't long before we were all in tears.

Charlotte was especially guilt-ridden and kept blaming herself. Jim told her, "I will miss her, but it was just a cat. Your feelings are more important to me than any cat. So don't cry. I'm not mad at you. I'm not even mad at the dog. He was just doing what dogs do."

We buried Sissy the next morning. Right beside Sammy and Snuggles and Max and Petey. We don't have funerals for our pets, but we did say, "She was a good cat."

—ob—

I may have to mortgage the house to pay the water bill, but I am committed to keeping the new trees and the garden we planted alive this summer. Extreme heat and all. Watering has become my life. I have hoses on three sides of the house, north, south and west. The north hose is the longest and it waters all



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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the new trees planted to the north, the new trees across the street east and my flowers in front of the house. It also assists the west hose in flooding the tomato plants every other day. The west hose, when it's not watering tomatoes, gets drug to the alley to keep troughs of water filled for the calves, it waters the chickens and anything else that puts on leaves or flowers on the west side of the house. The south hose waters the perennial flowers by a fence, sidewalk planters, trees and rose bushes on the south side. There have been times all three hoses were running, full blast, at the same time. The old water meter was really spinning.

—ob—

Even in our over-sensitive, politically correct society, I do not object to corporal punishment. Yes, I know children can be raised without spanking. I also know there are times when a swift "pop" on the seat of learning is in order. I told my girls that I spanked them while they were little so I wouldn't have to spank them when they got bigger. After the age of five or six, I never had to spank either one of them.

Sunday morning we were hustling across the street to church by way of the side door. Just then a young mother, with her 5-year old son in tow, burst through the door and said, "Don't watch, Carolyn,"

as she delivered two, sound swats to his backside, followed by, "Now, we're going back in there and you will behave."

I told her, "You don't have to apologize to me. I'm all for it."

Her fear was that she might be reported for abusing her child. I assured her, it would not come from me. Jim remembers his dad taking him, more than once, to the front steps of the old country church building for a little "Come to Jesus" moment.

How sad is it that parents have to be worried about disciplining their children in public for fear of being reported to Child Protective Services? Too many parents are already afraid of correcting their children for fear the child won't like them, let alone some snoopy "do-gooder" who lives down the street.

There's lots of scripture in Proverbs about child discipline. Best known perhaps is, "He who spares the rod, hates his child." "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is often attributed to the Bible. It's a great quote and good advice, but it's not in there.

So parents unite. Be the mommy or be the daddy. Your child won't hate you. In fact, they will be assured you love them.

Man admits to loving cats

Cynthia says I should write about brushing the cat.

I told her I can't do that. I'd be laughed out of the old men's society, and so soon after my 65th birthday.

I've never fathomed the reason, but it's true that older men don't seem to like cats, while older women tend to adore them. Maybe it's that the women start adoring the cat more than the old man, I don't know.

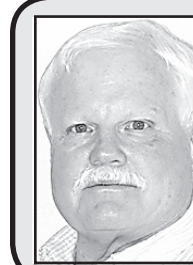
I do know that when Cynthia wrote frequently about the kids and the cats, she got complaint after complaint about those "danged cat columns." And every one came from an older man.

Older women would write and coo about how cute their kitties were — and how much they loved those cute cat columns.

I know there are men who like cats. I've been one of them since I was a boy. After Cynthia and I moved into our first house, we started looking for a kitten. We've had cats ever since.

So just put me down as one of those rare older men who actually likes cats.

We have this one cat I'm never sure about. Jezabel is more of a hair factory than a cat, really. And she



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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doesn't belong to us. She's sort of on permanent loan. By day, she's skittish, afraid of about everything, but at night, she comes out and demands to be petted.

Then you find out how much a cat can shed. She has longer hair and a couple of thick undercoats, and in the summer, it seems like she might lose it all.

She was shedding so much on the carpet and beds upstairs the other day that I took her out on the back porch and started brushing her. She pretends to hate the brush. She bites at it, hisses and growls. But she never tries to leave the bench where I'm brushing her.

In an evening, you can brush a pound or two of hair off that cat. I swear, and her hissing and mewing the whole time.

The other cat, our Molly, does not pretend to hate the brush. She loves

it. She'd stay and let you brush all night. And if you want to really be on her good side, brush her on top of the head, then under her chin. She adores that.

But Molly doesn't need that much brushing. Jezabel, well, that's another story. An hour doesn't solve the problem. Two might do it, but she'd nail you with one of her fangs before then.

But I can't write about that. I have to do something more mundane, like grandchildren or politics. Because I can't risk my status with the guys.

You'll just have to wait until Cynthia gets bold enough to write about cats again.

Oh, and by the way, you shouldn't believe everything you read in her column. Any of it, really. I've studied it, and I'd say there's only a 2.9 percent chance any of it's true.

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From the Bible

For this cause, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

— Ephesians 3:14-15