

# OPINION

DAILY JOURNAL

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"The Daily Journal is dedicated to community service, to defense of individual rights and to providing those checks upon government which no constitution can ensure."

SCOTT ALEXANDER  
founding editor, 1963

## AT ISSUE

A private campground near Franklin has been hit by vandals three times in the past year.

## OUR POINT

The latest incident is especially alarming because it appears to be racially motivated.

## Vandalism goes beyond mere harmless pranks

The Daily Journal

Horse Shoe Camp Ground is a 23-acre park southeast of Franklin.

There's not much there: a house, a picnic shelter, a couple of cabins and some canoes visitors use for paddling on Sugar Creek, which runs through the property.

And there's a cross that apparently someone doesn't like.

Three times in the past year, the camp has been the target of vandals.

About a year ago, the wooden cross was chopped down and turned upside down. Then about six months ago, someone painted on the cross.

Most recently, vandals painted the letters "KKK" on a cross about 200 feet off the road and on the entrance gate.

This latest incident is the most alarming yet as the letters are most commonly linked to the white supremacist organization Ku Klux Klan.

While it is unlikely the act indicates actual Klan presence, that someone used the letters is an affront and significant elevation in the vandalism.

Property owners think the religious nature of the campground attracted the vandals. The campground is used by churches of all denominations for picnics and outings. Church members also can attend the camp for outdoor baptisms.

However, the owners also are debating whether their granddaughter, who is black, may have been part of the motivation for the vandalism.

"I'm getting sort of worried," property owner James Overby said. "This is scary."

We agree. The racial nature of the latest incident is a cause for special concern. If the child is part of the motivation, this is no longer mere vandalism. It's a hate crime.

Overby also is concerned because each act of vandalism has been closer to the campground area itself. He fears vandals will go farther onto the property. Johnson County sheriff's deputies are planning extra patrols in the area, but everyone in the area needs to keep an eye out for unusual activity.

People who live near the campground or drive along Greensburg Road near there need to watch for suspicious activity and report anything to the sheriff's office.

This deplorable act of vandalism does not reflect spirit or values of the community at large, and it may take the entire community to stem it.

## Focus: Wiretapping

President's warrantless snooping must stop

The Providence (R.I.) Journal

President Bush has been wrong — and, on the face of it, unlawful — to permit the National Security Agency to wiretap and eavesdrop on hundreds of Americans' international phone calls and international e-mails without warrants from the special judicial tribunal established by statute to issue such warrants. (The tribunal has generally been very compliant with administrations' requests.) Further, we note that the FBI, not the NSA or CIA, is the agency charged with intelligence activities in domestic matters.



BUSH

The spying seems a serious violation: of the law, of executive-department-agency missions, and of separation of powers between the judicial and executive branches, and also of basic American principles of due process and privacy.

The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act says that a person violates the act if he or she "intentionally ... engages in electronic surveillance under color of law except as authorized by statute."

The potential here for Orwellian abuses is obvious. What, for instance, might various parts of the executive branch, or politically connected or other individuals, do with this personal information?

The administration's basic defense is that the snooping, which the president disclosed last week, comes within his purview as commander in chief, and that such warrantless snooping is sometimes necessitated by time constraints — that the spying has to be done quickly, to collect information that might be very important to national security. But the fact is that the tribunal can usually provide speedy warrants. If this has sometimes not been the case, the administration could have long since gone to Congress to seek more resources for the tribunal, or a law that would streamline its decision-making procedures, rather than ignore the law.

That the executive branch has apparently been snooping in this apparently untrammled way is deeply disturbing in a democratic society. Such activity must stop immediately.



... TO PEACE IN 2006

## New law on video game ratings could help parents control play

Twenty-five years ago, there were few video games on the market. There were the successors of the first video game, Pong. Atari was the game console of choice for most gamers in the late 1970s.

There was no need for game ratings. Pac Man and Asteroids were neither violent nor explicitly sexual.

Today, the gaming market is huge. There are hundreds of game titles available for several competing platforms. Young adults are one of the target demographics for video games these days, and some games are not designed for children.

A few years ago, the video game industry, under pressure from Congress and consumer watchdog groups, introduced a ratings system, similar to that used for motion pictures. Some games are intended primarily for teens; others are geared toward younger kids and family entertainment.

Many games have a rating of M, for mature audiences. These games are not supposed to be played by anyone under 17 years of age.

But there are no laws that prohibit stores from selling M-rated games to kids. It's supposed to be a voluntary restriction.

So State Sen. Vi Simpson, D-Ellettsville, said Friday that she was prepared to introduce legislation in the upcoming session of the Indiana General Assembly



Jerry Wilson

that would compel retailers to follow the rating guidelines. Stores would be prohibited from selling games containing an M rating to anyone under the age of 17.

Earlier last month, U.S. Sen. Evan Bayh said he would introduce federal legislation that would prohibit stores from selling M-rated games to those under 17 unless they are accompanied by a parent or guardian at the time of purchase. Bayh said studies indicate that violent video games lead some children to exhibit more aggressive behavior.

It is not clear that playing violent games causes violent behavior in kids. But some of the games are clearly not suitable for children. They depict graphic violence and illegal activity such as rape, car theft, drug use and the shooting of police officers.

And today's video games have superior graphics, which make the action look fairly authentic. The graphics are much more realistic than the cartoon-like figures that inhabited early video games. In modern video games,

the blood looks real, and so do the open wounds.

Some states already have laws that restrict the sale of M-rated games. But courts have also struck down such restrictions in some places, including Indianapolis. A federal judge recently placed a temporary injunction on a new Michigan law restricting the sale or rental of violent video games to minors.

Simpson said she wasn't trying to change age restrictions or ratings. She just wants the current ratings system to be enforced. The bill she plans to introduce, however, would simply put teeth into the rating system by forcing retailers to comply.

U.S. Sens. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., and Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., are backing Bayh's proposal for federal legislation.

Ideally, it should be up to parents to monitor their children's gaming behavior. They need to pay attention to game ratings, which are clearly marked on the packages.

But it isn't an ideal world, and sometimes even well-meaning parents fail to catch what's on their children's video screens. A law such as the one proposed by Simpson would make it more difficult for kids to buy or rent games that are not designed for them.

*Jerry Wilson writes this weekly opinion column for the Daily Journal. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.*

## Monitoring needed to avoid abuse of well-intentioned FBI surveillance

The FBI, it seems, has been keeping an eye on any number of domestic organizations that appear to have little to do with its stepped-up counter-intelligence assignment, shades of Cointelpro, "Commie" hunting, black-bag jobs, and a variety of other notorious activities from the '50s, '60s and '70s that made the bureau the scourge of any protester who might disagree with prevailing government policy in a demonstrative fashion.

The difference, of course, is that the word "terrorism" has been substituted for "communism" (at least in most cases) as the stated reason for checking up on such groups as the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, an admittedly pain-in-the-rear group who would discourage us from such violent activity as milking cows.

This comes at a time when the bureau's reputation for ferreting out truly dangerous folks who might be plotting another assault on America is under attack from a half-dozen quarters, including Congress, where former allies have been disillusioned by one failure after another.

The bureau reportedly has about 4,000 of its 11,000-plus agents now assigned to seeking out domestic links to al-Qaida and other terrorist networks. So why, it is proper to ask, is it concerned with the antics of environmental extremists such as Greenpeace and anti-war demonstrators?

The bureau says that it has a duty to check into any group that might be plotting some criminal activity. Fair enough, but as violent as some of these groups and individuals get is to climb a tree and refuse to come down or unfurl a banner where they shouldn't.

Don't misunderstand: the '70s weren't all that benign, and the FBI did have legitimate concerns when it came to the violent student



Dan K. Thomasson

groups such as the anarchic Weather Underground, many of whose members were extremely bright, if intellectually twisted, and who eluded capture for years.

Groups such as the Symbionese Liberation Army of Patty Hearst infamy were actually just made up of sociopaths who infiltrated the legitimate antiwar movement as an excuse for other activities, including extortion and robbery.

For that reason, the FBI's current posture in surveillance of seemingly nonthreatening organizations is not all bad. The danger comes in wasting time and money and effort on groups that are well-established with goals that have nothing to do with violent terrorism. This policy merely engenders bad publicity, is constitutionally questionable and deters the bureau from the mission of preventing another Sept. 11.

In a town where nothing is a secret for long, there is no hope of keeping such activity under wraps, nor should there be. The bureau has struggled to overcome the "storm trooper" image of the '70s and to install reforms that would preclude the abuses from recurring.

Granted the terrorists are a threat unlike any the nation has ever confronted, given their faceless nature. But there also are demands to maintaining an open society. Balancing the need to protect that openness from external threats while not adopting internal measures that injure the freedoms that

have made it so great is always delicate. Sometimes the cost of liberty is high, but it is necessary to pay it. Few of the nation's institutions should understand that better than the FBI with its record of internal turmoil during the past century.

Americans are increasingly sensitive about the "Big Brother" intrusions into their everyday living. Few complain about the need for stricter security nearly everywhere they go. But to be subjected to warrantless wiretaps and official fishing expeditions and other government spying on every aspect of their existence, including what they read at the library, is becoming almost an intolerable burden. That is especially true when it comes against a backdrop of decreased privacy in every normal endeavor of modern life.

Cointelpro, the compiling of information about anyone who seemed to disagree with what J. Edgar Hoover and his minions saw as the American way, was a disgrace the bureau survived only by cleaning up its act.

The break-ins and other activities, some clearly illegal and others highly questionable, conducted by the FBI were career ending for any number of dedicated FBI supervisors and agents, including Mark Felt, who recently admitted to being the "Deep Throat" of Watergate fact and fiction. Felt was convicted and subsequently pardoned for his part in illegal activities in the name of national security.

The final thing the FBI wants is a repeat of those activities. It can only undermine what is needed to keep the true terrorists at bay. No organization needs to be more diligent in monitoring itself to prevent the excesses.

*Dan K. Thomasson is former editor of the Scripps Howard News Service. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.*

## YOUR VIEWS

Attorney compensation out of line in budget

To the editor:

What's wrong with this picture?

According to the article on Dec. 20 ("Attorney's pay gets big boost," Daily Journal), attorney Jeff Eggers was getting a 62 percent raise amounting to \$65,000. What about the other county employees that haven't received a raise in two or three years, yet he was hired last January and is already getting a big increase.

I wish all of us could be paid \$65,000 a year for only 12 to 15 hours of work per week. I'm not saying he is not qualified, but let's get real. It was stated the county wants to do everything possible to keep its best employees; what about all the other best employees that work for the county? Don't they deserve compensation for their 37 to 40 hours of work a week?

I feel the commissioners need to curb their spending of our money. Let's see you cut budgets in the attorney's department.

Darlene Sample  
Franklin

Focus anti-violence effort on American cities

To the editor:

The savagery in America's cities is epidemic. In 2005 perhaps thousands of Americans were beaten, and many, like Vanessa Hawkins, were murdered.

Twenty-six-year-old Hawkins, a mother of two small children, was savagely gunned down in Indianapolis last week. Earlier in the week, 50-year-old Samuel McClain was dragged from his car in Milwaukee's inner city and beaten nearly to death. In both instances there was no police presence. None.

Oddly, both cities' primary airports — not known as high crime rate areas — were buzzing with law enforcement personnel and criminal detection devices. While terror prevention is a worthwhile cause, not one person was injured, let alone murdered, by terrorists in either city.

As Congress mulls the aftermath of breathing new life and billions of dollars in the Patriot Act, and as President Bush excuses the diversion of civil liberties while snooping out terrorists, perhaps its time to ask a pertinent question: Would our efforts not be better invested where Americans are truly terrorized: our inner-cities?

Kenn Gividen  
Columbus

## WRITE A LETTER

The Daily Journal invites readers to submit letters, opinion columns and e-mail comments for the opinion page.

### GUIDELINES

- Letters published in the Daily Journal must contain the writer's name and city or town.
- Letters sent to the Daily Journal must be signed and must include a daytime telephone number for verification to be considered for publication.
- Because of space and legal considerations, the Daily Journal reserves the right to edit any letters or articles and to limit comments.

### SEND IT

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