



## New England editorial roundup

August 10, 2013

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The Journal Tribune of Biddeford (Maine), Aug. 8, 2013

Outrage seems to be lacking from the American public these days, despite a recent explosion of evidence that our Constitutional rights are being undermined.

Former CIA and National Security Agency employee Edward Snowden recently put his life on the line in the interest of open government, revealing information he had sworn to keep secret, due to feeling a moral obligation to tell the American public what's going on. Whether one believes he's a criminal threat to national security or a hero of public access, one thing is for sure: Snowden's revelations have shone a bright light on the depth and breadth of government surveillance on average American citizens, which has clearly gotten way out of hand.

The Fourth Amendment in our Bill of Rights clearly states: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

The founders of this country took care to protect us against such treatment after seeing the tyranny of an unfettered government, and yet somehow too many Americans simply seem OK with the obvious violation of this right, which has now been going on for years.

Perhaps it's because technology has made it so easy and so seemingly unobtrusive. We don't have soldiers forcing their way into our homes to go through our things; rather, we have search engines tracking our every query and phone companies willing to hand over the records of our every call. And that's everyone, mind you, not just those suspected of criminal activity. It's your emails, credit card purchases, downloads, medical records, bank records — it's all there and technology improvements are only making it easier to store and keep on hand forever — for the day when the government decides they need to look into you, without a warrant or announced cause.

The Patriot Act, passed in the heat of the moment only a month after the devastating terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, definitely needs to be revised and weakened. The provisions of this act were a knee-jerk reaction to do everything we possibly could to avoid another terrorist attack, but it went too far and it's taken the majority of the public all this time to realize just how far this act has eroded our rights as American citizens.

Among its provisions, the act allows indefinite detentions of immigrants; gives law enforcement officers access to additional personal records as well as permission to search a residence or business without consent or knowledge of the owner; and gives the FBI free reign to search telephone, email and financial records without a court order.

Federal courts have ruled several parts of the Patriot Act unconstitutional, and yet Congress voted in 2011 to extend some parts of it for four more years. And in late July, Congress agreed to continue NSA collections of our data, rather than address the very real constitutional and privacy concerns of American citizens. The entire process of analysts being allowed to search through these massive mounds of "metadata" on us is top secret, so it's hard to say exactly what they're doing with it. There's even a long-standing, secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to oversee prosecution of those suspected of doing foreign intelligence within the U.S., which has been found to be watching U.S. citizens, too.

With no public oversight, how can we rest assured that those with access to our information are not abusing their power? Bias and conflict of interest have reared their heads at the IRS, which has been shown to be stonewalling the tax-exempt status applications of groups whose names suggest that their beliefs run counter to those of the Obama administration. What's to say it can't happen at the FBI or NSA level, too?

Put simply, it's illegal and unconstitutional for the government to be doing surveillance and gathering data on any citizen without reasonable cause or warrants. And it needs to end.

Such serious violations of the U.S. Constitution cannot be allowed by the citizenry and raises very serious concerns about the Obama administration and the president's respect for our rights.

Our national security is of high importance, yes, but at what price? This situation brings to mind the oft-cited Benjamin Franklin quote from 1755: "Those who would give up essential liberty, to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety."

In this age of terrorism and technology, that holds true more so now even than it did during Revolutionary times.

It's time for us as American citizens to stand up and fight for those rights that our founders knew were the basis of a free society, and maybe that starts with educating people on just how important they are.

The Republican American of Waterbury (Conn.), Aug. 9 2013

In 2009 and 2010, the Obama administration and Democratic members of Congress said the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act — Obamacare — would make health insurance affordable for all. Ironically, President Obama has used an extreme measure to spare lawmakers and their staffs an Obamacare-induced increase in the cost of insurance.

Lawmakers and their aides are insured through the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP). The government subsidizes more than 75 percent of their premiums.

Under Obamacare, lawmakers and staffers must be insured through exchanges by Jan. 1, 2014. There was no provision for government subsidies. Michael F. Cannon, health-policy studies

director at the Cato Institute, pointed out in a National Review Online column that the lack of subsidies would result in lawmakers and aides paying \$5,000 a year for an individual plan and \$11,000 for a family plan.

An Aug. 5 Wall Street Journal editorial observed that this fact resulted in "a full wig out on Capitol Hill." Many lawmakers have pompously predicted the setup will result in "brain drain"; that is, a mass exodus from the Hill.

The howls of protest prompted Obama to persuade the U.S. Office of Personnel Management to allow subsidies for lawmakers and their aides when they use the exchanges. The Journal pointed out the subsidies will be comparable to what the Capitol Hill gang currently gets, and that the president's stunt is illegal because substantial changes to the law have to be made via legislation.

This affair is a disgrace. For better or worse, Obamacare is the law, and everyone has to comply with it. That members of Congress whined — about a provision they approved — and that Obama took care of them epitomizes arrogance. The president's use of an illegal tactic makes the matter all the more shameful. His behavior and that of Congress set a poor example for all federal employees.

The machinations are gratuitously insulting to average Americans who face rising costs, reduced work hours, taxes and fees because of Obamacare. As the Journal asserted at the end of its editorial, "You can bet Democrats will never extend to ordinary Americans the same fixes that they are now claiming for themselves. The real class divide in President Obama's America is between the political class and everyone else."

So much for the law being "for the people."

This episode leaves no doubt that Obamacare's supporters didn't know what they were doing when they crafted it.