



Think Tanks: Big Brother moves into the passenger seat

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Randal O'Toole for [the Cato Institute](#): In 2008, the Washington legislature passed a law mandating a 50 percent reduction in per capita driving by 2050. California and Oregon laws or regulations have similar but somewhat less draconian targets.

The Obama administration wants to mandate that all new cars come equipped with vehicle-to-infrastructure communications, so the car can send signals to and receive messages from street lights and other infrastructure.

Now the California Air Resources Board is considering regulations requiring that all cars monitor their owners' driving habits, including but not limited to how many miles they drive, how much fuel they use, and how much pollution or greenhouse gases they emit.

Put these all together and you have a system in which the government will not only know where your vehicle is at all times, but can turn off your vehicle if it decides you are driving too much or driving in a way that emits too many grams of carbon dioxide or is otherwise offensive to some bureaucratic imperative.

I sometimes think privacy advocates are a paranoid bunch, seeing men in black around every corner and surveillance helicopters or drones in the air at all times. On the other hand, if a technology is available — such as the ability to record cell phone calls — the government has proven it will use it.

BROADBAND'S OK --- ROADS, BRIDGES NEED THE FUNDING

Michael Mandel for [the Progressive Policy Institute](#): Here are some staggering statistics: Since 2006, state and local real investment in highways and streets has fallen by 22 percent.

Their spending on sewer systems, in real terms, is also down by 22 percent. And real investment by state and local governments in water systems has fallen by a stunning 34 percent.

Meanwhile, over the same period, private real investment by telecommunications and broadcasting companies is up by 13 percent, according to statistics from the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Why, then, does President Obama want to load yet another spending burden — muni broadband — on localities that are already stretched too thin to cover their existing obligations? On Wednesday the president unleashed a set of initiatives designed to make it easier for cities and towns to build their own broadband networks. Setting up muni broadband networks certainly has some superficial appeal — apparently creating more competition for private Internet service providers and offering cheaper rates to poor residents.

But there's an enormous problem: State and local governments are already struggling to come up with the funds to maintain the current infrastructure of roads, bridges, sewer and water systems. Government infrastructure spending in real terms is way down compared to before the recession, leading to potholed roads, leaky water systems, and inadequate sewers.

Meanwhile private investment in telecom and broadcasting has continued to rise, boosting network speeds for both wireless and wired broadband.

DIVESTMENT ECONOMICS

Patrick Holland [for e21](#): For nearly four years, students at universities across the United States have been fighting to divest their schools' endowments from the fossil fuel industry. Divestment activists want universities to sell all of their shares in companies involved in fossil fuel extraction and distribution. ...

Environmental groups point to divestment's historic success by citing the case of apartheid South Africa. During the 1980s, campuses and companies across the United States divested from the South African government and many of the country's businesses. Environmental activists argue that divestment was one of the main reasons apartheid was eventually brought to an end. However, this claim is disputed by academics, most notably University of California Los Angeles professor Ivo Welch. In a 1999 study, Welch found that "the announcement of divestment from South Africa, not only by universities but also by state pension funds, had no discernible effect on the valuation of companies that were being divested, either short-term or long-term."

If the South Africa divestment movement had no real effect on apartheid, it is even less likely that the fossil fuel industry will be forced to change its ways. The fossil fuel industry is much larger than South Africa's economy was in the 1980s, and would be able to absorb a similar level of divestment without affecting its finances.

Even if divestment does not change the way fossil fuel firms operate, environmentalists still claim that universities should divest to send a message to the world that they are taking a stand

against climate change. It is hard to take this argument seriously when universities and students would suffer as a result of divestment.

Swarthmore College, the birthplace of the divestment movement, has released a study showing that if the school were to divest, it would lose between \$20 million and \$26 million of revenue from its endowment every year over the next 10 years. ...

It may make sense to prioritize taking a stand on climate change over revenue if you are a private individual or even a privately held business, but it makes no sense for colleges when the loss of revenue will prevent them from providing opportunities to students.