

Online privacy takes a hit from Congress

Congress did American consumers a great disservice recently when it dismantled an online privacy regulation that would have prevented internet service providers such as Comcast, AT&T and Verizon from selling the browsing habits and other information about their customers.

The move came in a bill sent to President Donald Trump that will kill a Federal Communications Commission rule that was issued in October and was designed to give consumers greater control over how internet service providers share information. The rule was scheduled to go into effect later this year, and the decision essentially reverts to the status quo rather than giving consumers additional protections that the Obama administration sought before leaving office.

The decision was decried by consumer groups and Democrats but lauded by most Republicans and telecom companies. The 215-205 vote in the House, though, was closer than many expected with 15 Republicans siding with the Democrats in the failed effort to keep the rule in place. The Senate had already voted to repeal it and Trump is expected to sign the bill despite the American Civil Liberties Union's populist appeals for a presidential veto.

Opponents of the rule argued that ISPs like Comcast and AT&T should not face more stringent privacy rules than online companies such as Facebook and Google, which collect user information and generate billions of dollars selling it.

Privacy proponents, however, countered that ISPs are far different because they have access to users' full web browsing habits, what devices and applications they use, their online locations along with their physical addresses, their financial information and even with whom they exchange

emails. That robust amount of information is particularly useful for marketers to craft highly targeted ads, which is part of the fundamental business model of many online companies.

With the repeal, internet providers won't be required to notify customers they collect data about or even ask permission beyond a user's initial approval of the terms of service agreement. As a result, many people may not even realize their patterns and profiles are being brokered.

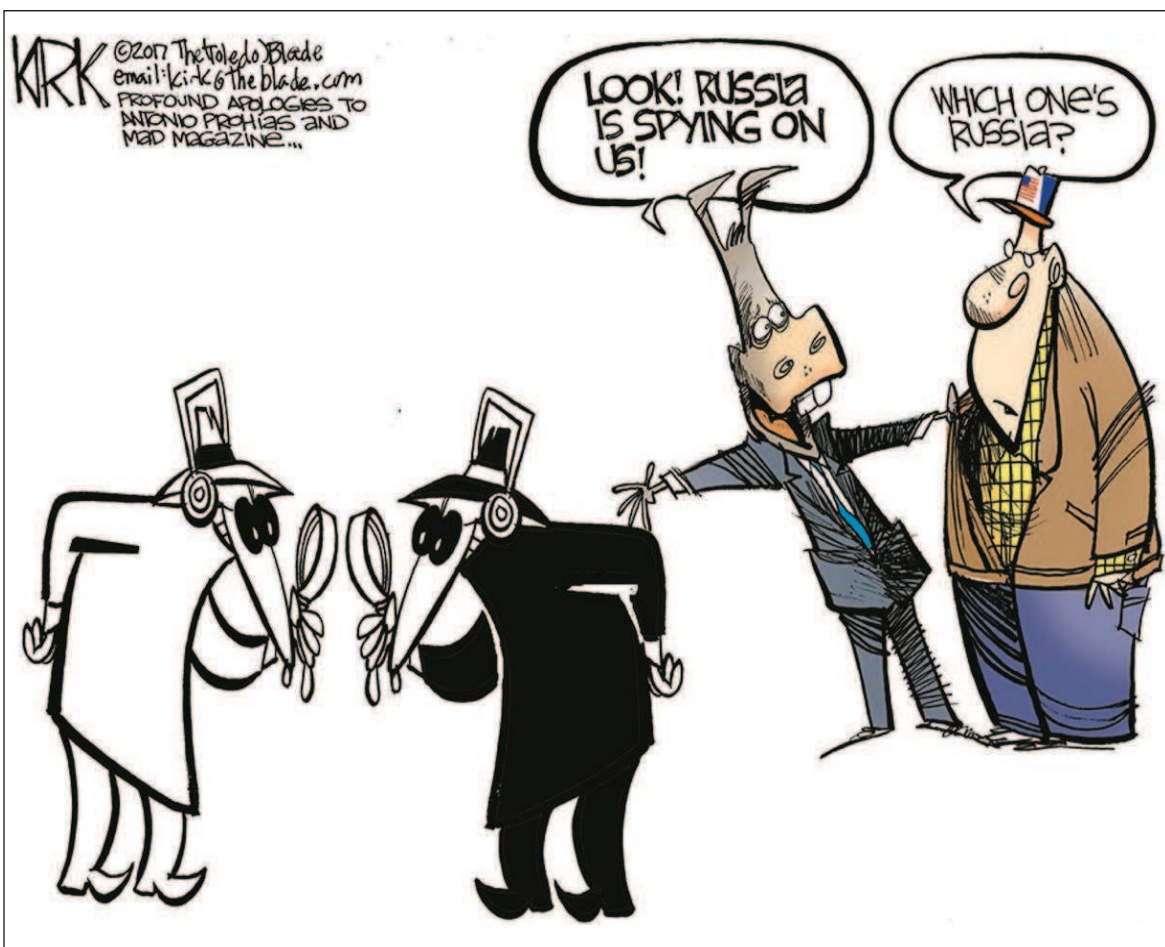
So what steps should online users and consumers take?

Privacy experts recommend consumers thoroughly familiarize themselves with the privacy policy of their ISP and specifically try opt out of data collection.

Another potential option is to use a Virtual Private Network, which provides private end-to-end internet connections and are typically used to keep out snoops when using public Wi-Fi. There are free and paid-for VPN providers, but they are also in a position to track online activities. Choosing a trustworthy provider, as Wired.com points out, can be a "tricky thing to confirm." Additionally, VPN privacy protections are limited because once a user logs into a website like Netflix or Amazon, those sites track users' activities so they can suggest tailored products and services.

According to Nuala O'Connor, president and CEO of the Center for Democracy & Technology, a non-profit digital rights group, the best course of action for those concerned about what's collected about them is to practice "digital privacy hygiene" by giving as little information as possible when doing things online, to minimize the digital footprint available to companies.

Importantly, if there was any question before, consumers should now know that Congress isn't on the side of their online privacy protection.



Curious Parker and the Man in the Yellow Hat

By Brianna Walker
To the Blue Mountain Eagle



Brianna Walker

My mom has said she should have named me George — not after my paternal great-grandfather but rather after the curious rascal monkey.

However, that wouldn't make any sense, because he lived with the Man in the Yellow Hat — and I live with my parents and my big brother. I am 15 months old, and my name is Parker.

I do feel like George sometimes, though. He is always trying to do good things, and it's not his fault when they don't turn out right.

My Momma is always asking us to help clean up the house. So after getting chocolate all over the TV remote, I thought I would help by washing it. I dropped it in the water, but it didn't come clean — so I thought I'd just let it "soak for a bit" like Momma does with the dishes. Then my brother came in and saw what I was doing.

Instead of smiling, he started hollering. I don't know what he was so worked up about. I was standing right there watching the remote; it wasn't going anywhere. Suddenly, my parents were there too, and before I knew it, I was whisked out of the bathroom.

I heard Momma groan as she pulled the remote out of the toilet. I didn't have any better luck when I tried to wash her hot rollers.

Now the bathroom is off limits to me. I just don't understand; I was only trying to help her clean like she had asked.

I try to help in other ways too. Our dog is getting older and I keep hearing my parents say we have to watch her food — make sure it's good enough for her. I tried to help by sampling it. It smelled pretty bad, and I couldn't help but make nasty faces. I crammed my cheeks full of soft beef chunks in gravy.

It made me want to gag, but for the good of the dog I tried to keep it all in. Even when my Momma came running in shouting, I squeezed my eyes shut and willed

my tongue to swallow.

Before I could decide if the food was "good enough" or not, my Momma had her finger between my teeth and was scraping it out.

I tried explaining how I was helping the dog — but for as old as they are, they aren't very fluent in baby. Momma washed out my mouth and face, and when I was clean again, she plopped me on the floor with a bowl of apple slices. I think the dog should skip her food and come eat mine — it tastes a lot better.

To save time, I tried to get myself dressed one morning. I went to my dresser and started looking at my clothes. What to wear? The white shirt? I pulled it out of the drawer and tried to press it on my head. I pressed and smashed. No luck. It must be too small.

So I tossed it aside. I tried the blue one. Same thing. And the green one. I decided all the shirts in that drawer were too small. I know that Momma likes to take out the clothes that don't fit anymore to make room for the bigger ones.

So I thought I would save her some time, and I unloaded the entire contents of the drawer onto the floor. When she saw me, she had the same look as the Man with the Yellow Hat when he sighs "Oh George..."

I tried to help load the dishwasher too. I filled it full of all kinds of dirty things: shoes, coins, pencils and my sippy cup. I managed to get the detergent out of the cupboard and climbed onto the door and sat down next to the soap dispenser.

But that's as far as I could get — that stupid cap was so stuck I couldn't open it.

That's when my Momma came in. I tried to ask her for help, but she was already scooping me right off of the door. She plopped me on the floor and I watched sadly as she undid all of my hard work and reloaded it with just dishes.

My efforts don't seem to go unnoticed so much as unappreciated.

I tried to help Daddy take bolts off the rototiller, I tried to reorganize his tool box, I tried to prime the grease gun — and each time I got pulled away and set down far away with some really dumb toys called "Plastic" and "Unbreakable."

It wasn't my fault I dropped the screwdriver down the air vent.

The cat scared me. I didn't mean to lose the kitchen door knob either. It just came off in my hands.

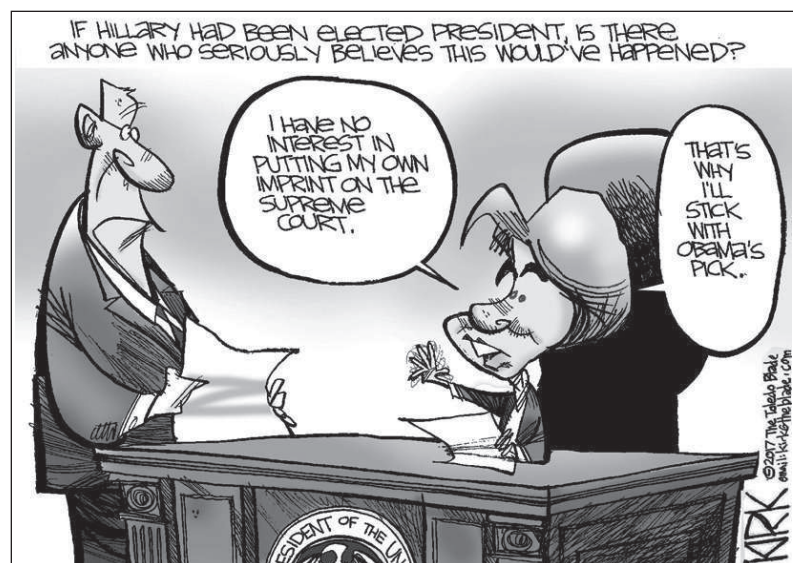
I took it because I thought it might open the bathroom door. When that didn't work I just put it somewhere. If I could remember where, I would get it — really I would.

I see that look on her face again. It really does look just like the Man in the Yellow Hat. Kind of a mix between sad and frustrated and maybe a little upset.

But I wasn't doing anything bad. I was just dumping this basket into the garbage can. You always say you hate this "Bill Basket." I was trying to make you happy. You know, maybe I should get you a yellow hat for Mother's Day.

Then you could look like the Mom in the Yellow Hat. I think the blanket in the spare room is just the right shade of yellow too.

Brianna Walker writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sanctuary cities

To the Editor:

I'm not able to do many things anymore, so I follow the news as best as I can. I watch the major news channels on TV so I can follow different views on things. It's hard to believe how divided our country has become. All of the politically correct and racial slander garbage is enough to make me sick!

Anyway, I have been listening to all this stuff on sanctuary cities, and so I went on the web and found

a map of the United States that listed cities, counties and states. And I found that most of Oregon is shown as a sanctuary area. I figured the west side would be listed, but was shocked to find Grant County on the list supporting the idea. Now to be clear I am not against legal immigration — illegal, no way. I vote, and I follow local news, including available minutes of city and county meetings.

I don't recall any discussion of Grant County becoming a sanctuary area. I certainly didn't get a chance

to discuss it with the powers that be, nor did I get to vote yes or no. Does anyone know?

Dan Graikowski
John Day

Editor's note: Oregon statute prohibits law enforcement agencies of the state from using agency funds, equipment or personnel to find and arrest people whose only offense is being "persons of foreign citizenship present in the United States in violation of federal immigration laws."

WHERE TO WRITE

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