

Text-to-911: Authorities say 911 texting has also been abused



AP Photo/Tamara Lush
Mina Justice speaks to a reporter discussing texting with her son, Eddie Justice, who was in a bathroom during the mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub, in Orlando.

Continued from Page 1A

that would allow dispatchers to receive texts, photos and videos in real time.

Out of more than 6,000 dispatch centers nationwide, a little more than 650 can accept text messages, with more than 150 making the text-to-911 upgrade this year, the Federal Communications Commission said.

Later this summer, the Astoria Police Department will take its text-to-911 system online after briefly using it during a recent phone outage.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, of New York, has been pushing for text-to-911 in New York City,

which has been studying it for nearly a year. Such a system, he said, can “save lives by informing 911 dispatchers of critical details that can guide first responders.”

Voice is still best

Emergency officials stress, however, that a voice call is preferred because a dispatcher can elicit details more quickly than texting back and forth. The major concern for many cities, including some of the nation’s largest, is that overuse of texting when it’s not absolutely necessary could slow response times and cost lives. In Los Angeles, which doesn’t have 911 texting, a police dispatch official last year cau-

tioned that response times for text 911 could be triple that for voice calls.

Nearly every municipality with text-to-911 service has sought to address that concern by promoting the slogan: “Call if you can, text if you can’t.”

Officials also warn that, unlike with voice calls, emergency responders can’t automatically see someone’s approximate location with text messages. Instead, they encourage people to give an accurate address or location quickly.

Supporters of such systems say their use would go beyond active-shooter and hostage situations to scenarios in which a battered spouse, for exam-

ple, could surreptitiously message police without alerting the attacker.

“If someone could snap a photo or a quick video showing the perpetrator that’d be enormously helpful to law enforcement,” said Joseph Giacalone, a criminal justice professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a retired police detective.

San Bernardino, California, rolled out its text-to-911 service in December about two weeks after an attack at a social services center where a married couple killed 14 people at a holiday gathering. In New Hampshire, where text-to-911 service is available statewide, Democratic Gov.

Maggie Hassan said it was a “common-sense initiative that will help save lives.”

Text-to-911 service also has been used by deaf and hard-of-hearing people to get in touch with police.

A deaf woman in Alpharetta, Georgia, texted police to report there were two children locked in a car in a shopping mall parking lot, and police rescued them.

Authorities say 911 texting, like its phone counterpart, has also been abused.

Last year, a teenage girl texted 911 to falsely report there was a shooter at a high school in Marietta, Georgia, said police, who arrested her at her home an hour later.

Divided: ‘The urban-rural split this year is larger than anything we’ve ever seen’

Continued from Page 1A

Town and country

There are few divides in the United States greater than that between rural and urban places. Town and country represent not just the poles of the nation’s two political parties, but different economic realities that are transforming the 2016 presidential election.

Cities are trending Democratic and are on an upward economic swing, with growing populations and rising property values. Rural areas are increasingly Republican, shedding population and suffering economically as commodity and energy prices drop.

“The urban-rural split this year is larger than anything we’ve ever seen,” said Scott Reed, a political strategist for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce who has advised previous GOP campaigns.

While plenty of cities still struggle with endemic poverty and joblessness, a report from the Washington-based Economic Innovation Group found that half of new business growth in the past four years has been concentrated in 20 populous counties.

“More and more economic activity is happening in cities as we move to higher-value services playing a bigger role in the economy,” said Ross Devol, chief researcher at the Milken Institute, an independent economic think tank. “As economies advance, economic activity just tends to concentrate in fewer and fewer places.”

That concentration has brought a whole host of new urban problems — rising inequality, traffic and worries that the basics of city life are increasingly out of the reach of the middle class. Those fears inform Democrats’ emphasis

on income inequality, wages and pay equity in contrast to the general anxiety about economic collapse that comes from Republicans who represent an increasingly desperate rural America.

Colorado’s example

These two different economic worlds are writ large in Colorado. It is among the states with the greatest economic gap between urban and rural areas, according to an Associated Press review of EIG data.

The state’s sprawling metropolitan areas from Denver to Colorado Springs is known as the Front Range. As it has grown to include nearly 90 percent of the state’s population, it has trended Democratic. Rural areas, which have become more Republican, resent Denver’s clout. In 2013, a rural swath of the state unsuccessfully tried to secede to create its

own state of Northern Colorado after the Democratic-controlled statehouse passed new gun control measures and required rural areas to use renewably generated electricity.

In Denver, City Councilman Rafael Espinoza elected to Denver’s last year as part of a group of candidates questioning the value of Denver’s runaway growth. Espinoza has seen his neighborhood of modest bungalows occupied by largely Latino families transformed into a collection of condominiums housing affluent professionals.

“Money just drives the discussion. In the presidential, Bernie Sanders was my guy for that one reason,” Espinoza said.

In contrast, Bill Hendren is desperate for money. He has about \$4 in coins in a plastic cup he keeps in the cottage on a small farm where he lives, rent-free. Hendren’s truck was sto-

len 18 months ago and he was unable to travel to perform the odd jobs in Otero County that kept him afloat. He’s now functionally homeless and a Trump backer.

“I don’t ever see a president caring about anyone who’s living paycheck to paycheck — if they did they’d have put the construction people back to work,” Hendren said. “Trump’s got the elite scared because he doesn’t belong to them.”

If bad luck and geography conspired to impoverish Bill Hendren, it’s an excess of money that’s to blame for Robin Sam’s plight. Sam, 62, left one apartment count-

ing on moving into another one being built in the rapidly-gentrifying and historically black neighborhood where he grew up. But that facility raised its rent over the threshold of Sam’s \$1,055 Section 8 voucher, and he’s been living in a homeless shelter all year, unable to find a new place in Denver’s fiercely competitive housing market.

“I feel like I’m being pushed out,” said Sam, who is black. He recalls houses and apartments being barred to blacks in his youth decades ago, but senses something else at play now.

“It’s money — and money changes everything,” he said.

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CLASSIFIED INDEX

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>ANNOUNCEMENTS</p> <p>035.....Lost & Found</p> <p>040.....Personals</p> <p>050.....Professional Services</p> <p>061.....Bankruptcy</p> <p>EMPLOYMENT</p> <p>060.....Babysitters, Child Care</p> <p>070.....Help Wanted</p> <p>080.....Work Wanted</p> <p>FINANCIAL</p> <p>105-106.....Business For Sale-Sales Op</p> <p>120.....Money To Lend</p> <p>REAL ESTATE</p> <p>130.....Open Houses</p> <p>150-200.....For Sale</p> <p>160.....Lots & Acreage</p> <p>195.....Homes Wanted</p> <p>205-275.....Rentals</p> <p>285-290.....RV/Trailer Space</p> | <p>MISCELLANEOUS</p> <p>300.....Jewelry</p> <p>310.....Tools & Heavy Equipment</p> <p>350.....Appliances</p> <p>360.....Furniture & HH Goods</p> <p>365.....Antiques & Collectibles</p> <p>375.....Misc. For Sale</p> <p>379-395.....Swap Meets & Garage Sales</p> <p>400.....Misc. Wanted</p> <p>430.....Arts & Crafts</p> <p>ANIMALS/LIVESTOCK</p> <p>460.....Animal Boarding</p> <p>470.....Feed-Play-Grain</p> <p>475-495.....Animal-Livestock</p> <p>485.....Pets & Supplies</p> <p>MARINE</p> <p>500-525.....Marine</p> <p>AUTOMOBILE</p> <p>535-595.....Automobile</p> |
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46 Announcements

Sunset Empire Park & Recreation District announces a change to their Monthly Board of Directors Meeting Schedule. Beginning in July, Board of Directors Meetings will be held on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 4pm. All meetings are held at the Bob Chisholm Community Center in Seaside and are open to the public. The July Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 19, at 4pm.

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