

# OPINION

OUR VIEW

## A needed balancing act

Protecting personal rights while protecting national security requires a delicate balance.

Part of striking that balance requires making sure there is enough transparency so Americans understand what protections are in place and why.

A bill introduced last week by U.S. Sen. Al Franken aims to provide just that by increasing transparency of government surveillance programs.

Called the Surveillance Transparency Act of 2013, the bill would expand and improve ongoing government reporting about programs under the PATRIOT Act and Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act that have been the subject of controversy in recent weeks. The bill would make it easier for companies to voluntarily disclose information about the data the government requires them to turn over.

Many views have been voiced on this issue. Whether you believe Edward Snowden is a traitor or whistle-blowing hero for revealing the United States is collecting information on its citizens' cell phone calls, we need to come to terms with what and how much Americans should know about government surveillance.

Now, federal laws require the government to release just a minimum amount of

information to the public about these programs. The companies involved are prohibited from releasing any information about the programs and their involvement.

Franken, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology and the Law, said in a statement he believes there are reasonable safeguards now in place in the programs to protect Americans' privacy.

"But the American people should not have to take the government's word for it," he said. "And I don't want transparency only where it's convenient to the government. The American public deserves more transparency."

Franken's bill moves toward expanded transparency by requiring annual government reports on a variety of issues relevant to privacy and surveillance. It responds to the concerns of more than 60 leading internet companies and advocacy groups who have demanded more government disclosure on surveillance programs and the ability to release information on data the government is requesting.

We want to believe, like Franken, that there are already safeguards in the programs that protect Americans' privacy, but we like that Franken's bill may provide information that will prove it.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Water, sewer increase difficult to absorb

**To the editor,**

We got our water and sewer bill recently and were shocked at the sewer increase. Does the sanitary sewer board not realize the number of people on a fixed income, pensions that do not increase each year, yet every utility, food, gas, insurance, etc. has?

What 25 years ago was a decent income has now put many just above the poverty line and taxed our budgets to the limit. The large sewer increase is more than we can find the funding for in our budget. We

just do not have the money to pay that large an increase.

We do not think that we are the only ones in this town in this situation. Young people with families, low income people, people anticipating the loss of their Boise job and yes, us senior citizens.

Why a 100-percent increase? Our sewer systems have not been upgraded and probably won't be. What's the money for? Is it to extend the sewer system east along Highway 11 affecting only a small percentage of International Falls? Are you

making us pay for a few? I do not think that the sanitary sewer board considered the financial needs of the residents. They have not used any common sense or consideration.

Maybe we all should just put up colorful outhouses in our backyards. Hey, it might even add to our property value! Also, we could invest in a compost toilet. If there are others unhappy with a 100 percent sewer increase, how about letting the board know.

**Helen Patterson**  
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GUEST COLUMN

## Marriage is alive and well — for some

Boy, are some Americans losing interest in marriage these days.

According to a National Center for Family and Marriage Research (NCFMR) study, the U.S. marriage rate is on the decline.

Whereas 92 out of 1,000 single women married in 1920, only 31 out of 1,000 are marrying today.

In a 2011 study, the Pew Research Center found that 51 percent of Americans were married, compared to 72 percent in 1960 — the marriage rate has declined by 60 percent since 1979.

Social scientists offer a variety of reasons for the shift. Younger people are much more likely to cohabitate than marry. Some prefer to remain single and focus on their careers and themselves. And the down economy has caused no small number of couples to delay their wedding day.

And then there is the “soul mate” factor, a modern construct.

Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project, explained to The Associated Press that single people today have a high degree of “expressive individualism.” They are demanding an unrealistic level of fulfillment from their mates.

It wasn't so long ago that a fellow could get by without movie-star looks and a captivating personality — even a bald, chubby guy could win the affections of a nice lady, so long as he had a good heart and was a CPA.

But nowadays, many single people are holding out for the perfect person — perfect looks and personality — and the



Tom  
PURCELL

good-hearted CPA isn't likely to make the cut.

The fact is, no one person can ever live up to our high soul-mate ideals — so, many people remain single.

Which doesn't bode well for single men or women — though single women fare far better than single men do.

Married men are physically, emotionally and financially healthier than their single counterparts. They avoid risky behavior.

They're much less likely to wake up in a pile of dirty laundry, still clutching the tequila bottle they began drinking from just before the party broke up.

The fact is, marriage is good. Married people produce happier, healthier children. Marriage produces stable, thriving communities. Happily married people enjoy more gratifying sex lives.

Married men live longer than single men — though their wives may tell you it only seems longer.

And there's something to be said for having a lifelong partner to support, and be supported by, as you go through life's rough patches.

Mark Twain said there is no

greater beauty and sweetness than the closeness and camaraderie of a husband and wife who hold deep affection for one other — a closeness single people are without.

Interestingly, the NCFMR study found that the most educated Americans still champion marriage.

In the last five decades, there has been only a modest decrease in the number of college-educated people getting married — which likely correlates with the down economy.

The biggest marriage drops have come among those who do not hold even a high school diploma — those who may be likely to lose government benefits if they do choose to marry.

In any event, though marriage rates are declining overall, marriage is doing very well among the college-educated.

So enthusiastic are they about the benefits of marriage, they spend every waking moment trying to pair up single people.

They push single women at us single men tirelessly — oftentimes, not very attractive single women.

I understand it's worse for single women. Their mothers, aunts and married sisters tell them their biological clock is ticking, they're going to turn into spinsters and they'll end up old and lonely and die of a broken heart.

Married people can be so heartless.

**Purcell is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review humor columnist and is nationally syndicated exclusively by Cagle Cartoons Inc.**

### The Journal welcomes letters from readers

Letters should be limited to 500 words or less. Longer letters may be edited. Letters must be signed and include the telephone number and address of the letter writer. Only the author's city address will be published.

Mail letters to The Journal, 1602 Highway 71, International Falls 56649. Letters can also be sent by e-mail to laurel@ifallsjournal.com.