

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

There's a lot of hand-wringing and finger pointing going on again in Washington, D.C. these days. First came the outrage that a federal contractor leaked classified documents to the press. Then came the revelation that those documents showed vast surveillance of Americans' phone and Internet use.

Two newspapers have published a series of top-secret documents outlining two National Security Agency surveillance programs. One gathers hundreds of millions of U.S. phone records while searching for possible links to known terrorists abroad.

The other allows the government to tap into nine U.S. Internet companies to gather all Internet usage to detect suspicious behavior that begins overseas. Talk about "Big Brother."

So how does it strike you that the government may be gathering information on you?

Surprisingly, in a poll taken after these stories surfaced, nearly one-half of Americans didn't oppose this kind of surveillance if it's in the interest of thwarting terrorism.

But another 37 percent said there is no acceptable reason the government should be snooping around their phone records. When it came to Internet surfing, 44 percent said it's unacceptable under any circumstances.

President Barack Obama vowed to bring a different, better kind of leadership to the dysfunctional capital. He said he'd make government more efficient, accountable and transparent. Hah!

He's quickly retreating behind the facade that this was a program he inherited from President George Bush and that the program had Congressional approval, along with a "secret" court's authorization that it was OK.

This controversy comes on the heels of the disclosure the government was snooping on journalists and the Internal Revenue Service was targeting and harassing Republican-leaning Tea Party non-profits.

Along with that, in a recent Gallup poll 78 percent of Americans disapprove of the way Congress is handling it's job. This marks the 45th consecutive month that more than two-thirds of Americans have given Congress the thumbs down.

Americans' high level of disapproval is less about what Congress is doing than about what it isn't doing: putting aside partisan bickering and getting things done. The hand-wringing by Congress saying they didn't know about this only makes things worse.

So where do you fit in concerning the government going after all this information?

Frankly, we have to be a little naive to think that our Internet use is not being tracked. The very companies we rely on for Internet, such as Google, Yahoo, AOL and Microsoft to name a few, all mine data about the way we use the Internet.

I was once told that Google keeps a file of every search ever made by you through their search engine. True? I don't know but it hasn't stopped me from using the Internet.

Social media, especially Facebook, has exposed more personal information than you can even imagine. Ever post a picture to Facebook? Once it hits the gallery, it's virtually there for the world to see.

So you see, our own ignorance has propagated the spread of our own personal information. Unless you take extreme security steps, you can almost bet that somebody on the Internet knows something about you that you'd just as soon they didn't know.

Life changed after 9/11. I'm not a fan of having the government snoop on me. Since I'm not a

terrorist, maybe I have no need to be worrying. But when it comes to protecting the national security of our country and the safety of its citizens, I can make a case that the end justifies the means in this situation.