

Is less more or is more less?

As Butch Cassidy said to the Sundance Kid: "Who are those guys?" The same could be asked about members of the so-called Tea Party.

The latest New York Times/CBS News poll paints a surprising portrait of Tea Party supporters. As summarized by the Daily Beast, the poll found: "Though Tea Partiers, now 18 percent of Americans, are more likely to classify themselves as 'angry,' they think their taxes are fair, and are in favor of Medicare and Social Security.

And while Sarah Palin has become the poster child for the movement, most followers don't think she's qualified to be president. Rather than being angered by personal financial hardships, Tea Partiers are more likely than the general public to categorize their financial situation as good or very good.

So why are Tea Partiers so riled up? The party's animosity is the result of a perceived disproportionate amount of help for the poor and blacks. Their three principal points of contention are health-care reform, government spending, and the notion that they are not being heard in the capital."

The poll went on to find Tea Party supporters tend to be Republican, white, male, married and older than 45. They describe themselves as very conservative and have a favorable view of the Bush administration. Three-quarters of them want smaller government, but (in an interesting conundrum) don't want to cut Social Security or Medicare.

You can read the entire poll at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/us/politics/15poll.html?hp>.

Now, the ironic thing about the Tea Partiers is that while they are crisscrossing the

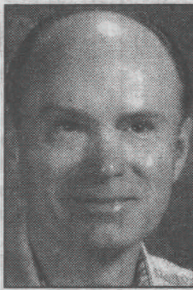
nation on an Express, the government they want to shrink is most certainly keeping tabs on them due to the "conservative" Bush-Cheney administration. Thanks to the Bush administration's campaign for warrantless wiretaps the National Security Agency (NSA) "still sifts through petabytes of information" on every man, woman and child in the United States.

In 2008, Congress even granted retroactive immunity for this policy, meaning that no entity can be sued for participation in this program. Says Jennifer Granick of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, "What people don't know is that there is a dragnet sucking up all their communications so the government can review them."

Hey, like your new iPhone? "AT&T is still routing all its data traffic through the NSA," adds Ganick.

Don't have an iPhone? Ah, the government watchers have more than one way to skin a cat. According to PC World magazine, if you use any Google service (Android phone, Gmail, Voice, YouTube, Picassa, Buzz, Google Docs, maps, calendar, chat) the feds can get the data. All it takes is a "strongly worded letter" thanks to the Patriot Act. The feds like Google because Google has such a massive trove of data it makes the fed's job easier.

This data collection is so pervasive that even your Internet browsing history is up for grabs. A record of the sites you visit is available



Neff
Zone

Jim
Neff

to any interested party, according to PC World. This includes everyone from the government to divorce attorneys. For the record, the FBI wants Internet Service Providers to store your surfing histories for two years.

Not only is the government watching all of your data flow, but they can find your location any time they want to have a friendly discussion with you. "Wherever

you carry your phone, the government can go to your wireless provider and use those records to figure out where you are," says Granick. This includes phones without a GPS chip. They can do this without a warrant, which is being challenged in a federal appeals court case right now. Guess who's making the argument for "less government" in this regard — the ACLU, an organization loathed by Tea Partiers.

You know, in a strange twist, the Tea Partiers want to be "heard in the capitol" and in a weird way they actually are. Apparently, the very tools the conservatives initiated under the Bush administration are allowing the government to "listen" to the Partiers (and all the rest of us) more intently now than ever before.

Knowing all this is so maddening it's enough to give a person a heart attack — which the government could also do if it wanted to, by the way. Researchers at the University of Washington, University of Massachusetts Amherst, and Harvard Medical School have determined

that medical implants that rely on wireless technologies for adjusting their setting can be hacked. Basically, they found they could hack into something like a heart pacemaker, take control of it, read the person's medical information and cause a ventricular fibrillation (which they noted could be "a potentially lethal condition"). According to the FDA, at the current time there is no "fix" for this situation, so anyone (government, hospital, company or neighborhood nerd) could do this if they knew the protocol.

The sum total here? Less government would mean these intrusions into our lives would go unchecked because there would be no governmental entity protecting us. However, if the government protects us wouldn't less actually wind up being more? If it's more government, wouldn't that violate the conservative principles that demand less government? But then what to do about the government invasion of our private lives brought about by letting the less government proponents condone ways to let that very government expand the ways in which to keep tabs on us? And if we don't want more government watching our every move, how does homeland security figure into this discussion?

It turns out "less government" is a catchy sound bite but determining just what that means in practical terms isn't so easy. As Abbot and Costello might say, "Who's on first?"

JIM NEFF is a local columnist. Comments to neffzone@gmail.com. Read Neff Zone columns online at www.neffzone.com/cadillacnews.