

# Opinion: Freedoms are eroding in the United States

**Publisher's note: Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Granite Bay, on June 27 delivered the following remarks on the House floor.**

**Mr. Speaker:**

Three major developments have occurred within the last six weeks that are each disturbing by themselves, but extremely alarming when viewed together.

The first was the revelation that for more than two years, one of the most powerful and feared agencies of the federal government was used to harass and intimidate individual Americans based upon their political beliefs.



Tom McClintock

Evidence has already established that hundreds of conservative groups were subjected to invasive interrogations when they sought to participate in the political process. This pattern of conduct was not limited to applications under section 501(c), but included audits of established conservative groups and individuals as well. This conduct reached the highest levels of the IRS. A similar pattern of abuse has been demonstrated in several other agencies including the Department of Labor and the Environmental Protection Agency.

These facts are undisputed and their implications are utterly

toxic to a free society.

The second development was news that the Justice Department had surreptitiously seized the telephone records of some 20 reporters covering Congress for the Associated Press in an obvious attempt to discourage whistleblowers from talking to the press.

Fox News reporter James Rosen and his family were stalked by authorities as he tried to get to the bottom of the Benghazi scandal. To obtain the search warrant to allow this, the Attorney General of the United States filed an absolutely spurious claim with the federal court charging that Rosen had conspired to violate the Espionage Act – the same act under which the Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in 1953.

The message to reporters asking inconvenient questions of the administration could not possibly have been more powerful or terrifying. And this week, the head of AP reported that their news sources have dried up in response to these naked acts of intimidation.

The third development is that the federal government has swept up the phone and internet records of millions of Americans in the name of state security.

The practice of the government searching your personal records without having first established reason to believe you have committed a crime is expressly forbidden by the Fourth Amendment –which was adopted in direct response to British officials indiscriminately searching homes and records for evidence of contraband.

Yet this government has done precisely that on a scale unimaginable in colonial times searching for evidence of terrorism.

If I know what websites you've visited and what phone numbers you've called – I know a very great deal about your political

and religious beliefs, your personal relationships, your sexual interests, your mental and physical health, your family finances.

And with that information in the hands of officials who have already demonstrated a clear willingness and ability to use their power to intimidate political adversaries into silence and to discourage reporters from asking embarrassing questions, our society could very quickly cross a very bright line between freedom and authoritarianism.

As if to underscore the point, the administration's spokesman recently told a national television audience that quote – "the law is irrelevant." He called these matters "a distraction." What does that say about a society that once prided itself on being a nation of laws and not of men?

All around us in this Capitol are the trappings of the Roman Republic. They serve as an inspiration – but also as a warning.

The Roman Republic didn't end because Caesar crossed the Rubicon with his legion. It ended because that illegal act was not effectively resisted and led to another usurpation and then another and then another over a period of years. It was the accumulation of many such infringements that brought the inexorable decline of freedom and set the stage for Rome's age of tyrants.

That is what Jefferson meant when he said the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. My great fear, as we adjourn tomorrow to celebrate the 237th anniversary of American freedom, is that sometime between the barbecues and the fireworks we shrug off these profound developments and go about as if nothing has happened.

This summer of 2013 has brought us to a crossroads, and I rise today to urge the House to give these events its full and undivided attention. All the facts surrounding these matters

must be fully laid out, those responsible held fully accountable, and the rule of law – and especially of our Constitution – fully restored.