



Eyes on the Road

The logic is diabolical, totalitarian, and simple even if the jargon cloaking it isn't: commercial drivers are already cruising the country — "The average truck spends 100,000 miles on the highway a year — 10 times more than an average car," [the Vallejo \[CA\] Times-Herald tells us](#) —, so who better to spy on us and report what they see? Or, as the [TSA's propaganda puts it](#), "First Observer engages surface transportation professionals — truck drivers, school bus operators, mass transit workers, port workers and others — in maintaining the safety and security of America's bridges, tunnels and roads."

The TSA tried this before, with a boondoggle known as "Highway Watch." Its "partner" then was the [American Trucking Associations \(ATA\)](#), lobbyists for the industry. And guess what: the \$63 million of our taxes the feds handed these political operators disappeared into their cronies' pockets. An article headlined "[Highway Watch lacked productivity, oversight](#)" quotes a report from the Office of the Inspector General at the Department of Homeland Security, the mega-bureaucracy harboring the TSA: "ATA met enrollment targets through multi-million dollar reimbursements to state trucking associations, and sole source subcontracts, and did so at the expense of developing cooperative relationships with other highway and motor carrier industry organizations."

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As if corruption weren't enough, there's Highway Watch's failure, too: the Inspectors General noted that "although there are now more than 800,000 Highway Watch members, active participation in the program has been low, averaging about four to five security incident reports a day." The magazine reporting the Inspectors' findings added that "a substantial portion of the program's calls focused not on potential terrorists but appeared to be reported solely because 'the caller perceived' individuals to be of Middle Eastern descent or Muslim. 'Members likely confused Sikhs with Muslims, and several described their subjects as either Middle Eastern or Hispanic,' the report reads."





Written by [Becky Akers](#) on October 15, 2009

Experts in security frequently point to this flaw in the police state: urging citizens who [“see something” to “say something”](#) rarely yields anything but false alarms since people tend to tattle on folks they dislike rather than genuine threats. But perhaps officials welcome the false alarms: the purpose of horrors like Highway Watch isn't protecting the “homeland” but pitting Americans against each other, sowing suspicion that sends them mewling to Big Daddy Government any time [someone so much as sweats or runs for the bathroom](#). And all those false alarms also offer pretexts for cops to harass victims who, however unpopular, are merely going about their business.

Naturally, Highway Watch pooh-poohed the fact that it encourages just such alarms: [“Highway Watch members](#) are instructed to look for certain kinds of behavior — not certain kinds of people,” Jeffrey Beatty, “a security consultant, formerly of the FBI and CIA” told recruits at one of Highway Watch's indoctrination sessions — sorry, tutorials. “Profiling is bad. Bad, bad, bad.”

Not to mention unconstitutional. Between that and the aforementioned corruption and failure, we might assume the Feds would pull the program's plug. No such luck. Inspectors General are apparently eternal optimists: though these bureaucrats spend their careers investigating government programs and finding exactly what they did at Highway Watch — unaccountability and murkiness that hides speculation ([“the program's \\$63 million](#) in expenditures was difficult for investigators to follow”) as well as vague objectives that disguise incompetence — they still [“\[believe\] the truck security program](#) should continue, so long as the program is more accountable, has a more clear strategy and spends funds wisely ‘and in a transparent manner.’” Right, and this year Congress really will put the country's welfare ahead of special interests’.

Predictably, our rulers took the Inspectors' advice: why kill a government program riddled with corruption and failure when you can simply re-name it? Throw a sop to the reformers by submitting the newly christened First Observer to competitive bidding, and continue converting gullible truckers into informants.

The winning bid came from [HMS Company in Alexandria, Virginia](#). For [\\$15.5 million over the next three years](#), they're coaching the guys in the big rigs to spy on us. Ergo, you may want to refrain from behavior known to catch said guys' attention:

- [“Strange activity”](#) in general.
- Calling your sweetie at work ([“Jo Anna Cartwright, who](#) manages the rural public bus system in northern Arkansas [and who trained with Highway Watch], said she had not yet encountered any terrorists in her job, as far as she knew. ‘We got a terroristic phone call the other day,’ she said, ‘but it turned out it was just the boyfriend of an employee.’”)
- Dressing for your own comfort rather than others’. ([“Say you're out at a truck stop and you see someone hanging out near your truck, wearing a jacket\[,” Jeffrey Beatty told his Highway Watchers.](#) “[Maybe it's too hot out for a jacket. Go back inside, alert someone...”)
- Expressing your opinion ([“I am a school bus driver.](#) I called after a [First Observer] training we had re: another driver, who happens to be from another country and has made several negative comments about America and the war we are in...”)

Stunningly, [HMS's home page](#) features a verse from Genesis that pretty much prohibits cooperation not only with Highway Watch and the TSA but government as a whole: “Keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just.” Indeed, another page entitled [“The HMS Vision”](#) alleges that “At HMS: Biblical Principles govern all corporate decisions...”



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Do you suppose “Biblical Principles” troubled the company for even a moment as it angled for \$15.5 million stolen from taxpayers? And all to fund a totalitarian program that, at the very least, ought to give Christians nightmares with its communist overtones of citizens informing on one another. “Patriots” in Soviet Russia and modern China rat out believers who attend an underground church or read a Bible. Yet American Christians cynically manipulate [“patriotic” truck drivers](#) to squeal on Moslems, Sikhs and others.

Were Jesus Christ on earth now, had He been born to a carpenter’s family in the “little town of Bethlehem’s” modern equivalent — say Xenia, Ohio, or College Station, Arkansas — we can imagine His growing up to help His dad in the shop. It’s easy to picture Him behind the wheel, delivering a load of lumber, gratis, to a widow’s house.

But dialing His cell phone on the way and reporting us to Leviathan? Or bidding for federal contracts?

Becky Akers, an expert on the American Revolution, writes frequently about issues related to security and privacy. Her articles and columns have been published by *Lewrockwell.com*, *The Freeman*, *Military History Magazine*, *American History Magazine*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *New York Post*, and other publications.



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