



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on May 7, 2013

Florida “Snitch” Line Urges Citizens to Report Neighbors

State lawmakers in Florida are under fire  from across the political spectrum after approving a controversial \$1-million “hotline” and “violence-prevention unit” for the Palm Beach County Sheriff’s Office aimed at encouraging citizens to report neighbors, friends, and family members to authorities. A national outcry ensued after a quote from Sheriff Ric Bradshaw in a news article suggested a resident who “hates the government” and expresses violent sentiments should be reported under the new program.

The scheme, which was approved by Florida lawmakers as part of the state government’s massive new budget, has sparked furious controversy. After the news was posted on the conservative-leaning Drudge Report, high-profile figures such as radio talk-show host and Palm Beach resident Rush Limbaugh have blasted and ridiculed the idea. Civil liberties questions and concerns about potential abuse have also been expressed, with critics lambasting state and county authorities for encouraging locals to “snitch” on each other.

More than a few prominent voices, meanwhile, are calling on Republican Gov. Rick Scott to stop the scheme using his line-item veto authority. A recent [editorial](#) in the *Washington Times* calling for the GOP governor to kill the funding, for example, highlighted numerous problems with the plan, suggesting it was aimed at “fundamentally transforming the country in the image of the Eastern Bloc.” It also blasted the sheriff and the controversial U.S. Department of Homeland Security for encouraging such paranoia and extremism.

The libertarian-leaning *Reason* magazine also called for a veto, describing the program as a “civil liberties abomination” and suggesting that there might be corruption in the sheriff’s office. “The Florida governor, Rick Scott, can still use the line-item veto to stop this state spending, and ought to,” [wrote](#) *Reason*’s Ed Krayewski. “Bradshaw’s response to the Seth Adams shooting ought to be enough to disqualify from any state support for yet more police powers.”

The quote from Sheriff Bradshaw that sparked the firestorm, published in an April 29 *Palm Beach Post* [article](#), hinted at what sort of residents authorities were hoping would be reported. “We want people to call us if the guy down the street says he hates the government, hates the mayor and he’s gonna shoot him,” the sheriff was quoted as saying, though more than a few critics left out the part about threatening to act on that hatred using violence. “What does it hurt to have somebody knock on a door and ask, ‘Hey, is everything OK?’”

Critics seized on the quote to suggest that Sheriff Bradshaw was encouraging citizens to report people opposed to government, or at least its policies. Liberty-minded economics professor Thomas DiLorenzo at Loyola University, for example, slammed the new program in a series of comments published on the popular libertarian site LewRockwell.com, even comparing the program to Soviet machinations aimed at silencing dissidents.



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“Do you suffer from philosophical intoxication?” Prof. DiLorenzo [asked](#) in a post that immediately grabbed widespread attention online. “That’s the term used by the Soviet government against critics of that government as a rationale for imprisoning political dissenters in mental hospitals. It is also apparently the plan by the current sheriff of Palm Beach County, Florida, Rick Bradshaw.”

In a [follow-up commentary](#) published the next day, DiLorenzo even suggested that “liberal” citizens might soon be reporting conservative pundit Rush Limbaugh using the hotline. “[Sheriff Bradshaw] wants people to report ‘the guy down the street who hates the government ...’,” the professor wrote. “Then the governmental critic will be sent for mental health evaluation, and his life possibly ruined.”

Pointing to the popular talk show host who “genuinely hates the Obama regime,” DiLorenzo suggested the prominent Palm Beach resident could meet the criteria for being reported. “One has to wonder how long it will take before a Palm Beach liberal will report Limbaugh to the town’s Soviet Union-inspired sheriff who may love to send Rush to a mental hospital to ‘send a message’ to all the other critics of government out there,” wrote DiLorenzo, a popular and respected figure among libertarians.

Prof. DiLorenzo was not alone in suggesting that Limbaugh could be targeted under the plan, with Infowars.com reporter Paul Joseph Watson [expressing similar concerns](#). In addition to being blasted as a Soviet-inspired scheme, the program has been compared by other commentators with Nazi Germany and the Communist East German Stasi informant system.

“Since people who post vehement political opinions on Facebook are already being kidnapped and taken to psychiatric wards across the country, how long before criticism of the state is officially recognized as a mental disorder?” Watson asked, adding that psychiatrists were already inventing new “diseases” targeting people who oppose authorities. “While the mass media is currently in a blind panic over anyone who still has the cerebral wherewithal not to blithely accept what they are told by the powers that be, labeling them crazy conspiracy theorists, the next step could actually see those individuals abducted and forcibly interned in psychiatric gulags if the likes of Ric Bradshaw get their way.”

Limbaugh himself eventually entered the fray as well. “Now, I don’t hate the government, but how many people...? (laughing) How many people are going to call the sheriff and report me? I have been saying publicly that I hope the president fails,” Limbaugh [told](#) his listeners. “Does that count as hating the government? I don’t hate the government, but how many people here in Palm Beach County who listen to this program think so? We’re huge here.”

In addition to conservative pundits and libertarian activists, mental health advocates in the area expressed concerns about the program as well. Executive Director Liz Downey with the Palm Beach County branch of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, for instance, cited concerns about civil liberties. “How are they possibly going to watch everybody who makes a comment like that? It’s subjective,” she told the *Palm Beach Post*. “We don’t want to take away people’s civil liberties just because people aren’t behaving the way we think they should be.”

According to the sheriff and state lawmakers who supported the funding, the program is not aimed at residents who simply hold “anti-government” views — at least if the “anti-government” person does not threaten to use violence. *The New American* asked the sheriff’s office for comment, sending a dozen questions.

None of the questions was specifically addressed. However, Deputy Eric Davis responded by downplaying the outcry. He also sent an excerpt from a media article saying the money would be used



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to fund “a 15-person ‘prevention intervention’ unit made up of five deputies, five mental health professionals, five caseworkers and a 24-hour hotline where citizens can report neighbors, friends or family members they fear may harm themselves or others.”

“This is what the money is for,” Deputy Davis told *The New American* in an e-mail. “This is why the Sheriff went to Tallahassee to address lawmakers. It has nothing to do with people hating the government... The important part of the quote was the person saying he was going to SHOOT the individual. The threat was not just hating the government.” (Emphasis in original.)

Sheriff Bradshaw also downplayed concerns about potential abuse — neighbors reporting each other over longstanding grudges, for example, or spouses involved in a bitter separation abusing the system. “We know how to sift through frivolous complaints,” he claimed, drawing more criticism from opponents of the plan.

Despite the massive national outcry, whether Gov. Scott will use his line-item veto authority to put the brakes on the controversial program remains to be seen. For critics, however, the fact that such a scheme was even proposed — let alone funded — is troubling enough. Plus, as *The New American* has documented for years, the efforts to expand government power at the expense of citizens’ rights is hardly unique to Florida or Palm Beach County.

Indeed, at the highest levels of government, the agenda has been quietly underway for decades. In recent years, the trend has been accelerating at breakneck speed, with numerous federal agencies and departments classifying people’s mundane political views as potential indicators of terrorism. State and local authorities have also been encouraged and bribed by the federal government into adopting similar views. More than a few analysts, meanwhile, suggested the “Orwellian” Palm Beach County program is simply a logical extension of federal policies and paranoia.

Alex Newman is a correspondent for The New American, covering economics, politics, and more. He can be reached at anewman@thenewamerican.com.

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