The ACLU Foundation of Vermont is holding a daylong conference on "Privacy: How much is left?" at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Montpelier on Tuesday, June 13, 2006.


According to the press release I received, there will be “panel discussions on Internet privacy, medical records, and federal Real ID standards, as well as a presentation on attorney-client privilege.”

The press release continues with these details of the topics covered in the day-long program [mildly edited]:

* The erosion of privacy and the importance of the Fourth Amendment. What are our privacy rights? Is privacy actually defined anywhere, or is a good deal of privacy simply perceived because of circumstances such as remoteness? What protections are accorded by the Vermont and U.S. constitutions? Is domestic surveillance conducted by the National Security Agency constitutional? Should records once defined in the paper age as "public" be reclassified because of new access capabilities created in the computer age? Why has privacy become such a topic of interest?

* Data aggregation. What is data aggregation, why is it so lucrative, and should the government be regulating private aggregators? Might the government itself violate privacy rights by obtaining information about citizens from private aggregators (bank records, airline records, credit card records, etc.)? What is data mining? Identity theft? Should government do more to prevent and fight identity theft?

* Internet privacy. When someone goes online, who knows what about whom? What access does government have to e-mails and records of an individual's online browsing? What access do service providers or other third parties have?

* National REAL ID. Last year Congress created standards that all states must soon meet when issuing drivers' licenses. Some feel this is the first step toward a national identity card. What are the implications of such a document? Would standardized drivers' licenses be effective security measures, protecting identity? Or could they have unintended consequences that might actually threaten security and invade privacy? How will data on the licenses be shared, to whom will these data be available, and for what purposes will the data be used?
* Medical records privacy. Recent Vermont health care measures include a provision for pilot programs to build aggregated medical records databases. Do such databases enhance medical services at the risk of invading privacy? Another bill considered by the Legislature gathers all prescription records for certain drugs into one electronic database. Is such a database justified within the context of regulated drugs, or is it an invasion of individuals' privacy rights?

* Attorney-client privilege (ethics unit). What practical and ethical considerations must attorneys deal with in protecting the privacy of attorney-client privilege? What liability is incurred when records are compromised? What file disposal methods best protect privacy?

* The wild, the wacky, the future. What's ahead? Will technological advances lead to radio chips implanted in our bodies for identity purposes? Will our cars carry on-board computers that monitor our driving habits, with the information sent to our insurance company to determine an individualized rate for us? Will we soon all carry national identity cards with magnetized strips containing personal information?

I hope some of you will make it to beautiful Vermont in June. Montpelier <http://www.montpelier-vt.org/> is a charming town – the smallest state capital in the nation – surrounded by the gorgeous Green Mountains and filled with friendly people (8,000), charming bookstores (at least 4), excellent restaurants (at least a dozen) and even two (2!) movie theaters. Be aware that traffic can be difficult during rush minute, but otherwise our single traffic light in the center of town handles cars and pedestrians quite well, even when there are three of four cars backed up at the light.

I look forward to meeting you at the conference.

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More information and a registration form (PDF document):
<http://tinyurl.com/ozzwe>

Conference brochure (legal-sized PDF document):
<http://tinyurl.com/od3ek>

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