

Nation/World

Ground search launched for missing A-10 warplane

EAGLE, Colo. — The Air Force on Sunday launched its first ground search for a missing pilot and his warplane, scouring three mountainous areas identified as possible crash sites by U-2 radar photos and a hiker with a metal detector.

The five-member ground crew, equipped with metal detectors and mountaineering gear, was exploring three areas of the New York Mountain range after an expert determined avalanche danger was low in the rugged wilderness about 20 miles southwest of Vail.

"I'm no more excited. I'm no more optimistic and no less optimistic," Lt. Gen. Frank Campbell said of the development in the search for Capt. Craig Button, who disappeared in his bomb-laden A-10 Thunderbolt April 2.

Farrakhan blames Clinton for Middle East peace problem

WASHINGTON — President Clinton is hurting the prospects for peace in the Middle East with a policy that too willingly "bows to the dictates of Netanyahu," Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan said Sunday.

day.

Appearing on NBC's "Meet The Press," Farrakhan said Clinton should have been able to dissuade Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, from building homes for Jewish settlers in east Jerusalem. The Palestinians want to establish the capital of a Palestinian state in that sector, which Israel took from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War.

"The world says he shouldn't do this," the Muslim minister said. "America has influence in Israel but is not using that influence in a constructive way."

Report: Violent crime down sharply in U.S.

WASHINGTON — Americans experienced significantly fewer violent crimes in 1995 than in 1994, with rates for such acts as rape, robbery and assault down by 12.4 percent, the Justice Department said Sunday.

The broadest decline happened in the suburbs, where crime rates dropped in all areas of personal victimization except rape and sexual assault.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics said the fall was the largest recorded since the bureau began taking its annual National Crime Victimization Survey in 1973.

Number of the Beast?

Critics think Social Security numbers used improperly

By ROXANA HEGEMAN
Associated Press

Martin McKay didn't vote in last fall's elections. Louisiana refused to let him register.

Although he is a qualified resident of the New Orleans suburb of Kenner, he refused to give the state his Social Security number.

Voting, he argued, is a constitutional right. "It's not conditioned on anything."

McKay sued.

McKay, a health care worker, is among a growing group of people who are alarmed about the widespread demand for Social Security numbers.

They see it as a creeping invasion of privacy and worry that, with a Social Security number, prying eyes can tap into a person's lifetime earnings history, credit background, medical records and other personal information. Heightening the fears are reports of criminals using someone else's ID number to obtain credit in their name.

Some of the critics go further. They raise the specter of the biblical "mark of the beast" and liken it to Hitler's stamping ID numbers on Jews in concentration camps.

On the other hand, police and government workers see the Social Security number as a fast way to keep track of criminals, as well as ordinary employment and health histories.

The use of Social Security numbers is spreading to unprecedented levels — not just for state and federal programs, but in private industry as well.

For example, a little-known provision of a recent federal law establishes a new ID system to use Social Security numbers to track medical records, said Don Haines of the American Civil Liberties Union in Washington, D.C.

The health ID number — for private insurance as well as federal Medicare and Medicaid — would put a person's lifelong medical history into a government computer database, Haines said.

Broken promise?

When Social Security was set up in the 1930s the American people were solemnly promised the number would never be used for anything other than Social Security.

That promise has been broken, Haines says. He anticipates that growing concern about a national ID number will lead to federal legislation controlling the private use of Social Security numbers.

"I am surprised that people are so docile about it, they seem to go along with the government," said Joe Cook of the ACLU in Louisiana. "It is really scary because the Social Security number has become a de facto identification number — the kind of thing you find in totalitarian, authoritarian societies."

The use of Social Security numbers for identification is often tempered by each region's cultural and historical influences.

Southern states are especially intrusive, some say, probably remnants of various requirements left over from efforts to control its black population.

Louisiana, for example, collects Social Security numbers for driver's licenses and voter registration. The state also wants the number for a hunting or fishing permit. And in some areas a child's Social Security number is required to register for public school or even to get a public library card.

Until March of this year, Louisiana driver's licenses had Social Security numbers on them. But the state lost a lawsuit, so people now have the option of keeping the number off. Drivers

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DON HAINES

American Civil Liberties Union

must still give the motor vehicle department their Social Security number for their records, however.

That lawsuit was filed by a man who said that using Social Security numbers violated his freedom of religion. Just months after he won his case, another person sued on the same grounds.

Their basis was a passage in the Book of Revelation: "And he causeth all ... to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save that he had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."

Forbidden by law

McKay's attorney, Vincent Booth, argues that federal law — specifically Public Law 93-79 Section 7 — prohibits the government or any of its agencies from denying an individual any right, benefit or privilege because that person refuses to disclose his Social Security number.

Booth also argues that the SSN requirement is a violation of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993.

In a similar case in Virginia, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in a 1993 case that using Social Security numbers as security for voting was an impermissible infringement on the right to vote, Haines says.

Louisiana's voter registration requirement that a person provide both a Social Security number and their mother's maiden name makes a person especially vulnerable to financial fraud, since those two pieces of information together can be used to open credit card accounts, Booth says.

Booth adds that it didn't make his client feel any easier that in the past the state has used prison inmates as data processors.

For its part, the state contends the information is safeguarded. Elections officials argue that the Social Security number is one of the best identifiers it has to check for duplicate voting registrations, convictions and deaths.

Louisiana Gov. Mike Foster got into the number fight last year when he nixed a \$1.8 million deal in which the state planned to sell driver's license pictures and data, including Social Security numbers, to a New Hampshire company.

Image Data wanted the information to sell to businesses as a guard against credit card fraud and for debt recovery. The company, which is working on similar deals with other states, puts the information into a nationwide electronic database.

Saying there's "got to be some right to privacy," the governor killed the sale because the Social Security numbers would have given the company access to personal information about Louisiana's 2.5 million licensed drivers.

"One of the points of being an American is you don't need to produce an identity card or identity numbers," Haines says.

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