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Fight or flight? Mesa County enters the Flock camera debate

By SAM KLOMHAUS
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When a meeting room in the Mesa County Library proved too small to hold the assembled crowd, it headed outside on a hot summer Wednesday to meet.

The crowd bridged gaps in age, gender identity, social class, financial status and even politics.

What brought this diverse group together for a spirited discussion?

Flock cameras.

Flock cameras are a brand of automatic license plate reading cameras used by law enforcement agencies across the country, including the Grand Junction Police Department and Mesa County Sheriff's Office. They have drawn concerns about invading residents' privacy and improper use.

Departments across the country have come under fire for misuse of Flock cameras, including officers searching for their own license plates, as well as the license plates of friends, family members, romantic partners and

exes.

The meeting was the inaugural meeting for De-Flock Mesa County, a group concerned with getting local law enforcement agencies to stop using the cameras.

The American Civil Liberties Union has said Flock and other automatic license plate reading cameras are creating a mass surveillance network in the U.S.

"It doesn't matter which company has its creepy cameras in your neighborhood. They all have the same problems: a lack of transparency, oversight, and regulation into how they collect, store, and use our data, and how to hold public and private actors accountable if they abuse it," the ACLU's website states. "Just think about how much someone could learn about your life if cameras constantly tracked where you drove. They could find out which doctors you visit, what house of faith you worship at, who you visit or drive around with — even which political



LARRY ROBINSON/The Daily Sentinel

Locals concerned about Flock cameras listen to Quinn Miller lead the first De-Flock Mesa County meeting outside of the Central Library on Aug. 5. At the meeting, groups were formed to discuss ways to push back against the encroachment of automatic license plate reading cameras, including educating the public about the issues with the cameras, creating ordinances to govern how and when the cameras can be used and speaking to governing bodies like Grand Junction City Council and the Mesa County Commissioners about concerns residents have with automatic license plate reading cameras.

meetings and protests you attend."

HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT USES AUTOMATIC LICENSE PLATE READING CAMERAS

Automatic license plate reading cameras collect snapshots of passing traffic, Mesa County Sheriff's Office Division Chief Art Smith told the Mesa County Commissioners at a recent meeting.

"They do record license plates, they do take photos of the vehicles, and they tell us where and when those photos are taken," Art Smith said.

In a March interview with The Daily Sentinel, Grand Junction Police Chief Matt Smith gave an example of potential use as in the event of a bank robbery and the suspect leaves in a gray

sedan in an unknown direction but police can't get more than a vague description of the car — say, a bumper sticker or a certain type of wheel rims — GJPD can use its cameras and license plate readers to narrow its focus to identify the vehicle.

Art Smith said the cameras don't take photos of people that are in the vehicles.

Matt Smith told The Daily Sentinel in March the cameras read license plates in public spaces, don't share information with private third parties, don't share information with immigration enforcement, or don't look into residences.

Art Smith said when the cameras detect license plates, they run

the plates through law enforcement lists for plates that are "of interest," such as a stolen vehicle.

"We do take requests and we can vet those things internally," Matt Smith said. "If an officer has a case and they want to look to see if the (license plate reader) data can help them, they have to log in and then they have to write the case number, and the reason for the search, and we only allow searches, even internally, for criminal investigations and we track all that and it's audited either weekly or bi-weekly to make sure we're complying with our own rules."

Art Smith said the Sheriff's Office doesn't share license plate reader data with federal agen-

cies or agencies outside the state of Colorado.

Flock data is available to other law enforcement agencies in Colorado. When asked via email how other agencies get Flock data, GJPD responded, "Outside agencies would be required to provide the necessary information (case number, reason for search, crime type) to process a request."

When asked how GJPD can be assured the other organizations are using the data responsibly, GJPD said, "All Colorado law enforcement agencies are required to follow the Criminal Justice Information Services regulations and state law and would be held accountable by

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Three cheers

Triplets returns to Grand Valley after 670 days in four different hospitals

By JACE DICOLA
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In 2024, Grand Valley native Rebecca White and her husband, Daniel White, learned they were pregnant with triplets — one of the first in the region's recent history.

When one of their triplets, Henry Harold White, was born at 1 pound and 5 ounces and in need of critical care, the two were tossed into a journey they never anticipated.

But after 670 days and countless brushes with death in four different hospitals across three states, a 26-pound Henry joined his brothers Benjamin and Peter at their Grand Junction home for the first time on Thursday, Sept. 3.

"We've always been of the mindset that we're

advocating for all three," Daniel said. "Rebecca's always said the best thing we can do for his brothers is to give them their brother as they grow older. They're triplets, not twins."

While the 28- and 29-year-old parents said they are infinitely thankful to bring all three boys home with healthy futures, the two are turning to their community for help with the laundry list of expenses that have accrued over nearly two years of displacement.

But of equal importance, Rebecca and Daniel said they hope their story will inspire parents like them and illustrate the importance of perseverance and advocacy — not only for their child, but to trailblaze better care for similar children in the

future.

"Mothers are more than just breast milk. You really have the opportunity to save your own child's life by paying attention, advocating and speaking up when things aren't right."

"Henry, he's not only changed our lives, but his story has changed a lot of other babies' lives just like him. We're so incredibly proud of him and the fight that he's been through," Rebecca said.

FIGHTING FOR THREE

Rebecca and Daniel said they often joked about the chance of a three-for-one deal because a relative of Rebecca's had triplets over 50 years ago, but her first ultrasound revealed it was their new reality.

With that exciting revelation, however, she would

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COURTESY OF REBECCA AND DANIEL WHITE

Triplet Henry White smiles and giggles while taking in his surroundings on a car ride home to the Grand Valley after being hospitalized for 670 days post-delivery.

COMMENTARY

Wildfire resilience is built long before the fire ignites

Year over year, we have witnessed devastating droughts and water shortages in Colorado. As county commissioners from the Western Slope, we know these challenges are not abstract. They are unfolding in our communities right now. If we're going to prepare for and prevent large-scale wildfires in Colorado, we will need everyone — individuals, communities, businesses, and all levels of government.

This summer has reinforced what many of us have been preparing for over many months. In Routt County, two wildfires ignited just hours apart, reminding residents how quickly conditions can change. In Pitkin County, smoke blanketed the Roaring Fork Valley for multiple weeks, forcing families to plan daily activities around air quality alerts rather than simply enjoying the outdoors. These experiences are becoming more common as prolonged drought, extreme heat, and dry fuels create the conditions for larger, more destructive wildfires.

We know wildfire preparedness starts at home. Thinning vegetation, using fire-resistant building materials, and ensuring emergency responders can quickly identify properties all make a measurable difference. It also means neighbors need to work together because one well-prepared property cannot stop a wildfire if surrounding homes remain vulnerable.

At the same time, resilience requires leadership at all levels. The good news is our communities have not been standing still. With wildfire as the top

hazard concern for local government leaders, our counties have made wildfire preparedness a priority. While wildfire is a natural and healthy part of many forest ecosystems, we must work to reduce its impacts in communities by investing in mitigation, strengthening emergency response, and helping homeowners prepare to leave home if that is their safest option.

In Pitkin County, we have expanded our wildland fire response capabilities, invested in early wildfire detection technology, and strengthened partnerships through the Roaring Fork Valley Wildfire Collaborative. Together, local governments, fire districts, public land managers, and community partners are identifying the highest-priority projects to reduce dead brush and dense timber that act as hazardous fuels, improve evacuation planning, and build long-term community resilience.

Further north in Routt County, we have taken an equally collaborative approach through our Emergency Management Department, which leads multi-agency coordinated efforts. Education, outreach and tools for preparedness are available through the community-driven Routt County Wildfire Mitigation Council, which strives to support fire-adapted communities. Innovative programs such as assessing homes for fire risk and providing



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funding for homeowners to address those risks are helping residents understand that wildfire preparedness begins at home, not when smoke is already in the air.

Both of our counties also adopted Colorado's statewide wildfire-resilient building codes. Stronger standards for newly constructed buildings will help ensure that the \$33 billion in annual construction spending in Colorado prepares homes built today for the realities of tomorrow.

Our efforts demonstrate an important truth: wildfire resilience is built long before the fire ignites. Still, there is more work to do.

The good news is that ensuring homes are built or renovated to wildfire-resistant standards only costs approximately 2 to 3% more than traditional construction. However, when homeowners are facing rising insurance costs and increasing construction expenses, we need more investment if we want to become more prepared. Our state already offers a suite of incentives for retrofitting homes, and additional cost-share programs and financial incentives for wildfire resilience would deliver practical improvements that protect lives, property, and neighborhoods.

We also need greater investment at the landscape scale. Advanced technology cameras can detect smoke within minutes, identifying new fires before

they become large, expensive, and dangerous. Expanding these systems into the highest-risk areas, particularly in communities where insurance has become difficult or impossible to obtain, would strengthen Colorado's overall wildfire response while making these investments more equitable.

Likewise, funding for local governments to carry out forest health and wildfire mitigation projects continues to fall short of the need. Communities across Colorado are ready to undertake responsible fuel reduction, prescribed burning where appropriate and conditions allow for it, and other landscape-scale mitigation efforts. The challenge is not a lack of projects or local commitment. It is a lack of sufficient resources to complete them.

At a time when federal investment in wildfire prevention, mitigation, and recovery is decreasing and Colorado continues to face significant budget constraints, creative partnerships and sustained commitments will be essential. The landscapes that make western Colorado extraordinary are worth protecting. By working together and investing in prevention, we can reduce risk, protect lives, and preserve the forests, watersheds, ranches, and recreation lands that define our way of life.

Sonja Macys is a Routt County commissioner and board president for Colorado Communities for Climate Action. Jeffrey Woodruff is a Pitkin County commissioner and former member of the Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code Board.

You Said It

HERE'S WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND

As a dedicated farmers market enthusiast, I am disappointed each year with Grand Junction's farmers market. It is scheduled at the hottest time of day and year, which discourages attendance. The farmers have few produce booths as most of it is non-food items. Think flea market. Obviously, Grand Junction does not want to improve attendance as each year they employ the same failing tactics.

If someone doesn't like the You Said It section, then don't read it. The majority of Daily Sentinel readers like to read it, send an opinion or thank a stranger for a kindness.

This week, my car got a flat tire while I was driving my cat to the vet for travel papers. I barely made it. My cat got her appointment, but while I was waiting for AAA, a gentleman leaving the vet's office with his dog (and baby) stopped and changed my tire. I was quite touched that he took the time to help. There is an old saying: If a person needs help, it will come. This has been true so many times when I found myself in a "pickle." Someone always came. Thanks to my angel.

It's very concerning to read the story of two sheriff's deputies "investigating" vandalism, then the man they arrest becomes unresponsive and dies. That's a critical gap in the information — and disturbing.

The Saturday, Aug. 29 commentary section contained entries from Scissors, Pramenko and Lorenc that expressed almost too much common sense. Can this information be enough to entice some (or all, ha!) of the roughly two-

thirds of eligible voters who don't vote to fill out a ballot and walk it to the mailbox? A nice thought, but I doubt it. Excuses for not voting are numerous, but the true reason is simply laziness! If you like what you see going on in your city, state, country or world, stay on the couch. If you don't, get up and vote!

Now that Colorado Mesa University and President John Marshall have gotten their football complex next to the Lincoln Park Barn — coming to fruition in the fall of 2027 — perhaps Marshall can find a football team to match the lofty expectations of this new construction. It certainly isn't the current 2026 football team, which lost its home opener at Stocker Stadium by the score of 38-14. Hoo boy!

I just saw Jeff Hurd's latest political ad that he wants to stop Congress from insider trading. How about starting at the top with the president?

Tired of the mess in Washington D.C.? Tired of a do-nothing Congress? Vote out the incumbent. Be a maverick; leave the "Hurd!"

Climate scientists were accurate in their predictions of the effects of continuing to burn fossil fuels. However, we ignored or made fun of them, and now we are in a mess.

Hope you enjoyed the coolest summer you'll have for the rest of your life! And we have a president who wants to bring back coal! Good luck, America!



Why do U.S. citizens tolerate having a president who could care less about our environment and addressing climate change? Has the man ever visited one of our incredible national parks?

On its list of "Core Values" on the editorial page, this newspaper shows the top priority is "impartiality." If The Daily Sentinel is so impartial, we would love to see even one pro-Trump cartoon, headline or article! President Trump is trying to fix the many layers of chaos created by the last administration, yet all we see is anti-Trump everywhere. And unfortunately, uninformed

minds are being influenced. There is no balance in reporting.

Having lived on the Great Lakes, Trump would have been best advised to repurpose Lake Erie as Lake Natalie. It is the shallowest of the five lakes and will remind Trump of the reflecting pool as algae blooms are common.

It's high time we updated the political term, lame duck presidency, given the shenanigans of the current occupant. I guess with his approval trajectory, we could go with flounder.

In Newfoundland, 9/11 remains living memory

GANDER, Newfoundland and Labrador — Twenty-five years after stranded airline passengers landed here, the people who welcomed them are growing older and the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, pass from living memory into history.

While many Americans and Canadians can still say where they were that day, a growing number know of what happened only through classrooms, memorials and the musical "Come From Away."

The passage of time is especially visible in Gander. Nearly 7,000 airline passengers and crew members suddenly became guests of this small town in central Newfoundland after American airspace closed amid terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon and the downing of hijacked Flight 93 near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

Yet calling it the Gander story leaves out much of what happened.

Former Appleton Mayor Derm Flynn told me buses carried passengers to towns across central Newfoundland, including Gambo and Norris Arm.

In Appleton, volunteers waited with whatever they could find. "Come in, welcome, you're safe here," Flynn recalled telling the exhausted and confused arrivals.

There was no plan filed away to follow. "It was left to everyone's devices, everyone's common sense, everyone's hospitality and everyone's ingenuity," Flynn said.

Oz Fudge, then a Gander police officer, understood even during those

bewildering days that the story would outlive those who experienced it. He walked into the high school and found a young passenger crying on the floor.

Fudge knelt beside him and tried to give him some hope. "When you get to be an old fart like me and you're sitting in your big comfy chair with your grandkids on both sides of you, this will be on that TV because this will go down in history," Fudge recalled. "This will be history, and you're a part of it because you got stranded here."

Fudge reached into his pocket and gave the boy a police patch. Someday, he said, the boy could show it to his grandchildren.

The future Fudge described has arrived. He is now 71, and Flynn will turn 80. Children born well after the terrorist attacks are adults, and many who lived through Newfoundland's response have died. Sept. 11 is no longer only memory.

Appleton shows how communities have tried to hold onto that memory. Flynn promised that the town would hold a commemoration every year as long as he remained mayor. Appleton held the service annually for 20 years and plans a milestone observance for this year.

That memory is also carried by people such as Fudge, who continue telling the stories, and by the culture that made the response possible. He recalled how neighbors show up with



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food after a death, a birth, a fire or any other crisis. Undoubtedly, Newfoundland's hospitality is shaped by it being an island, where, for centuries, people have literally washed ashore.

The most visible legacy is "Come From Away," which went from Broadway to stages around the world.

A local production, which finishes its fourth season on Sept. 13, provides a major boost to tourism.

The musical put Gander on the map for people who otherwise never visit. Many come just to meet the characters. Flynn has hosted visitors in his home for nine years.

Mike Goosney, Newfoundland and Labrador's tourism minister and a Progressive Conservative member of the provincial legislature, sees the province's rich history as one of its strongest attractions.

"I think it's our history, and it sells itself," he said during an interview in the capital of St. John's. The kindness memorialized in "Come From Away," he added, continues to draw visitors because the story is one of "kindness and camaraderie and compassion."

Goosney said tourism directly supports more than 23,000 jobs and contributes 650 million Canadian dollars (roughly \$469 million) to the economy. That matters in Gander, where visitors fill hotels, dine in restaurants and venture beyond town to discover fishing villages and dramatic coastal landscapes that rival the scenery anywhere

in North America.

The elephant in the room is the present state of relations between Canada and the United States. President Donald Trump's economic war against Canada has strained a friendship that Americans too often take for granted. It is impossible to experience what Newfoundlanders did for Americans on one of our darkest days and not see the shortsightedness of treating Canada as an adversary.

Flynn said the conflict is no longer politicians merely being politicians. It is "affecting people's lives, affecting people's jobs."

Goosney did not pretend otherwise. "It's definitely disappointing, and if I said anything different, I would be lying," he said. Still, he said Newfoundland would "keep our doors open" to Americans.

Flynn was equally direct: "Our dispute is not with the ordinary people of the States."

Asked whether the divisions of 2026 would change Gander's response to something today, Fudge did not hesitate. "It would have been the same way," he said.

That answer may be Gander's most important lesson. Political disagreements are real, but they do not erase the deep ties between Americans and Canadians.

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