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Title: You should know this about Red Light Cameras

In order to realize revenue from red light cameras, so exciting to some, Lubbock will have to agree to ensure a high number of red light runners each day, at each intersection covered by a camera.

You read that correctly. Red light camera contracts with local municipalities contain quotas of how many red light infractions must occur daily in order to keep the cameras and enjoy revenue from them. If the number of light runners drops below the quota, the city gets punished.

The people of Mesa, Arizona learned this after they had installed their cameras and used them for some time. The cameras generated revenue but failed to significantly reduce red light running (which as been the universal result.)

Bothered by not producing a large reduction in red light running, Mesa's traffic engineers used the only proven method known which reduces red light running: lengthening yellow light times. The cameras provided a good daily measurement of red light running but had not greatly lowered infractions. However, lengthening the yellow light times made a huge difference and red light violations went down dramatically.

What happened next is the real story of the cameras.

The camera vendor, ACS of Texas, sent the city a letter pointing out that their contract had daily a quota that required a high number of violations per day!

Mesa was then threatened by the vendor and had to renegotiate the contract, turning over most all of the revenue to the vendor to keep the cameras. Even this money grab was not enough. Documents show that if the frequency of infractions falls below ten per day in a covered intersection, the vendor may remove the cameras or force the city to move them to an intersection which will make more money.

Red light camera vendor contracts require governments to ensure a high number of red light runners, otherwise the vendor could not recoup its multi-million dollar investment and make a profit operating the systems.

Mesa has also been threatened, in writing, that if they lengthen the yellow light times at other camera covered intersections, they will have to begin paying the vendor a flat monthly fee to keep the cameras. So much for all that new revenue, and so much for the claim that the goal is public safety!

Studies, even those touted by red light camera supporters, do not show an overall significant reduction in collisions. But even if they did reduce collisions and save lives, that would not be an acceptable reason to use them.

The 6th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says that any accused "*shall enjoy the right ... to be confronted with the witnesses against him.*" Such is not possible with law enforcement by camera.

4th Amendment problems exist as well related to government monitoring citizen action with intent to prosecute, as is done with red light cameras, without probable cause and with no warrant.

There are 5th Amendment problems too. That key protection says that a person may not be “*deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law*” which includes a jury trial. None is offered with these red light fines, yet you may be deprived of your property.

Several states have banned these cameras on the grounds I’ve outlined. Most instructively, the Commonwealth of Virginia, from which much of our Constitution comes, has done so.

Making tickets issued a civil matter, as opposed to criminal as cities must do to get around the 6th Amendment’s guarantee of the right to face one’s accuser, is immoral.

Couple constitutional problems with the indisputable fact that red light camera vendors require local governments to maintain quotas of red light infractions at each intersection covered, and you have a situation which should be unacceptable to any law abiding Texan.

If Lubbock’s council and mayor go forward to install these cameras as planned, which don’t reduce red light running; which force cities to keep a high number of red light runners plowing through intersections to meet vendor quotas, and; which, more importantly, violate our constitutionally protected rights, they should be deeply ashamed.

Robert Pratt can be heard weekdays on AM790 KFYO from 5 to 7pm as host of Pratt on Texas. His website is www.prattontexas.com.