

Jerry Brown's Sacramento Has Controversial Program Watching Public's Social Media Posts And Creating Dossier On Their Thoughts

Filed Under: [social media](#), [West Sacramento](#)

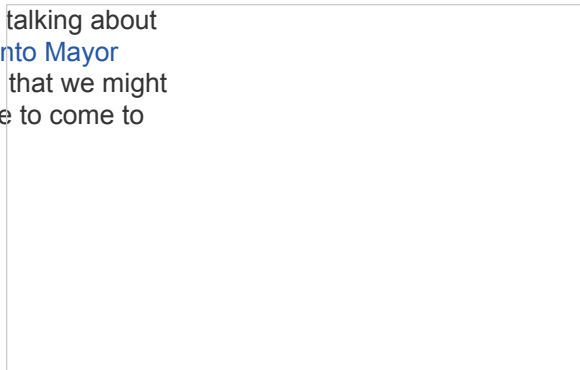
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA (CBS13) — [Sacramento](#) is the first city to launch a controversial new program that watches what people post about it online.

The pilot project gives city leaders a look at what's trending in the city, whether it's good or bad. It's also creating privacy concerns around how the data is being used.

When a wave of mailbox thefts hit the city last year, people complained about it on social media, and West Sacramento was watching. City leaders were alerted to the community concerns by a new system.

ALSO: [How To \(Mostly\) Stop Facebook From Sharing Your Data](#)

"We saw the thing that most people were talking about were mailbox thefts," said [West Sacramento Mayor Christopher Cabaldon](#). "That's something that we might not have noticed just by waiting for people to come to city hall or filing a complaint."



 cabaldon on social media monitoring West Sacramento Launching Controversial Program Watching Publics Social Media Posts

The pilot project with Zensity gives city leaders like Mayor Christopher Cabaldon a look at what's trending in the city, whether it's good or bad.

The city is using Zensity, a system that crawls through publicly available social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. It takes all of that data and sorts through to find what people are talking about and whether it's positive or negative.

"The purpose of Zensity is to see the big picture," he said.

In January, concerns came from the [closure of a Safeway store](#) and the [brutal murder of two sisters at the hands of their father](#). In March, a shooting threat at River City High School generated negative posts over the lack of updates from police and school staff.

"It's not that Zensity replaces our other forms of civic engagement, it's just a way to listen more," he said.

But in the wake of the [Facebook Cambridge Analytica scandal](#) and concerns over data collection in general, some are worried about where that data goes and who sees it.

ALSO: [App Helps Track West Sacramento Homeless To Improve Outreach](#)

"There are ways this could go wrong," said Peter Eckersley with the Electronic Frontier Foundation. "Once you get into policing there are many more potential concerns around the use of artificial intelligence."

The ACLU worries about the potential misuse of the technology. Facebook started as a social engagement tool, then turned into a behemoth that exposed user data, even in unplanned ways.

"There's no privacy issues because we're not opening up anything that hasn't already been published publicly

for the purpose of being public,” Cabaldon said.

Instead, he hopes it will give all residents an equal say in civic matters.

“It allows us to hear the whole community and not just the loudest voices that come to our chambers for a public hearing,” he said.

The city is spending \$12,000 from the Measure E sales-tax increase to license the software for one year. It gets a 66 percent discount as an early user.

