

KeyOpinion



The Smell of Fear

We do have something to be afraid of, but the only way to defeat it is by stepping up our citizenship

Robert C. Koehler
Contributing Columnist

That \$100-a-bottle perfume that inconvenienced passengers tossed into airport trash cans last week, along with the lip gloss, toothpaste and shampoo, added the missing element of home-front sacrifice to the war on terror, which may explain why initial media coverage was so enthusiastic and skepticism-free.

It was a story everyone understood — us vs. them, wisecracking stoicism, a big jolt of fear — and for a while the nation could return to its pre-quagmire delusions of Pearl Harbor/Good War redux. That's the story the media have tried to cover all along.

And, oh, they keep trying: "This nation is at war with Islamic fascists who will use any means to destroy those of us who love freedom, to hurt our nation." That was our president, of course, still reading "The Pet Goat" to the nation, still quoted straight up as he simplifies a complex world for us. The fanatics who hate freedom will even try to detonate our Prell, our Crest, our Fiji Water, our Eau de Toilette.

Turns out that those of us who thought something smelled funny about the timing and all — peace had just broken out in Connecticut, for instance — were getting a whiff of more than just discarded aftershave.

It's outrageous enough that the arrest in London last week of 24 terror suspects was premature and dove-tailed not with the accumulation of evidence against them, but with the White House's need to call the voters who dumped Joe Lieberman "Defeatocrats" (House Majority Leader John Boehner) and coddlers of "al-Qaida types" (Dick Cheney).

But the outrage is magnified by the fact that the Bush administration, even as it stoked national paranoia over a plot to detonate carry-on liquids aboard transAtlantic

flights was, according to the Associated Press, quietly defunding the development of technology to detect those very bombs. Indeed, the research arm of the Department of Homeland Security has become a "rudderless ship without a clear way to get back on course." This is the bipartisan assessment of the Senate Appropriations Committee, AP said.

Only Republicans are allowed to be this incompetent! It's a "heckuva job, Brownie" all over again, but with a wicked twist. When it comes to national security, the clueless fumbling of the Homeland Security bureaucracy feeds the Bush administration's politics of fear.

"Weeks before Sept. 11, this is going to play big," a White House official, speaking anonymously about the London arrests, told Agence France Presse. Yeah, I'll bet. Especially if the Defeatocrats can do no more than cringe and whimper that they're tough on terror, too.

And the "new normal" at airport terminals gets a little bit weirder. Apropos of nothing but politics, shoeless passengers add a new step to the counterterror dance they have to do to board a plane.

In a rational world, terrorism would be addressed with objectivity, intelligence and an ongoing effort in this flawed world, to redress the cultural misunderstandings and gaping injustices that foment it; and maybe, while we're at it, an all-out commitment to developing alternative energy sources, among much else. On Planet Bush, terrorism is addressed by turning shampoo bottles into

objects of hysterical suspicion. And when we get used to that, they'll come up with something else. It's faith-based fear, and they can't govern without it.

Consider how desperate the situation is:

"Republicans have become increasingly alarmed that the war might drag down incumbents," the New York Times reported the other day. "A senior Republican consultant with ties to the White House, who was granted anonymity so he could describe internal research for a Republican member of Congress, said he had recently conducted a focus group in a highly contested Congressional district in the Philadelphia suburbs.

"He was shocked," he said, "at the degree of hostility among Republicans toward the war, even accounting for the fact that Northeast Republicans are more moderate than their counterparts in the rest of the country."

What to do, what to do? Rather than think about changing course, in recognition of the fact that it's losing its base, the Bush administration, through calculated and sophisticated fear-mongering (no incompetence here), is pushing us deeper into more of the same. If the U.S. Constitution were color-coded, we'd be in code red.

"The goals of the White House are not to stop terrorism; the goal of the White House is to allow terrorism to fester in order to — as the basic game plan for dictators goes — use fear to consolidate tyrannical power and do away with our Constitutional checks and balances of government and guarantee of individual liberties," the Web site BuzzFlash editorializes.

The word for this, the editorial notes, is treason.

Get it yet? We do have something to be afraid of, but the only way to defeat it is by stepping up our citizenship and working to defeat the crowd that is turning the whole country into a place whose laws are no more recognizable than the procedures at our airports.



Koehler

Longboat Key News

5370 Gulf of Mexico Drive, Suite 210
Longboat Key, FL 34228
Phone: 941-387-2200
Fax: 941-387-8288
www.lbknews.com

Steve Reid, Editor and Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

Melissa Reid, Associate Publisher
Associate Editor
Lia Martin

Vice President Sales/Marketing
Christopher Berloni

Production/Distribution Manager
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Peter Holliday • Al Green
Karen O'Dowd • The Chaser
Glenn & Carole Swope

Graphic Design
Jerry Maguire • Caron Cooper

Newsroom
news@lbknews.com

Letters to the Editor
letters@lbknews.com

Advertising Department
ads@lbknews.com
941-749-0400

LongboatLetters



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The following letters were sent to Town Hall.

Let's Join Forces

Please distribute to all members of the Town Commission, Planning & Zoning Board members, Monica Daigle, Donna Chipman, Herb Marlowe and Larry Arrington.

I would like to suggest a joint meeting between the Town Commission, the P & Z Board, staff and Arrington & Marlowe to evaluate and revise the visioning survey for Longboat Key. The survey would be "worked out" among the groups together thus foregoing much of the shuffling back and forth of revisions.

If you consider this sensible, productive and timely, lets pull together and get the job done to satisfaction.

Walter Hackett, Jr.
Town of Longboat Key
Planning and Zoning Board member

Commissioner Nixes Idea

I am not in favor of committing to this. We need to wait and let the normal course of events play out; then we can consider this.

Lee Rothenberg
Vice Mayor of Longboat Key Commission

Lightning, from page 1A

ple could go to bed and not be aware there was a problem.

It was only when she went upstairs she could smell something burning.

She commented on what a wonderful job the firefighters had done as they searched the house.

"The firefighters stayed for hours making sure everything was all right. There were so many of them," Buermann said, as she remembered back to the night before. "They put a hatchet through the ceiling and found the fire."

Lightening had struck metal flashing on the fireplace chimney and had traveled down to a vent to a natural gas flame line.

Firefighters found a fire in the attic adjacent to the fireplace. The fire was extinguished, and the gas and electricity were turned off.

Longboat Key building official Randy Fowler was

called and determined the house was not safe to inhabit because of fire, smoke and water damage. He advised that the Buermann family should not stay in the house.

Fowler estimated that there was between \$10,000 and \$25,000 damage to the home.

Buermann was deeply impressed with how much the police, firefighters and Randy Fowler had helped them. Even to the point where they advised them where they could get a crew out to restore their home, and how the police department had arranged for them to stay at the Hilton on Longboat Key.

"The Hilton was quite generous," Buermann said. "They allowed our three dogs to stay in the two rooms. They were very accommodating."

That same night during the lightening storm, an apartment building in Bradenton was struck by lightning. Residents were not as lucky as the Buermann family.