

Editorials



Linda Chavez



Terror in the skies: We must be serious about security

Just in time for the busiest travel week of the year, we have this news from the General Accountability Office, Congress' investigative arm: It's relatively easy to get bomb-making materials through security checkpoints and onto airplanes. A group of undercover GAO workers apparently did so recently, managing to get past baggage screeners at 19 airports, despite new rules intended to prevent precisely this kind of thing from happening.

Is this just holiday hype, or are we really vulnerable to another 9/11-style plot?

According to the report, investigators found two types of devices that terrorists could use to cause an explosion in the air. One was an IED (improvised explosive device) using a liquid explosive and a low-yield detonator, which also could be used independently to explode but would cause more damage in combination with liquid explosives. The other device was a simple IID (improvised incendiary device). The materials for components to make these bombs are available at local stores and on the Internet, which also hosts myriad websites with instructions for making these and other explosive devices.

The GAO, for security reasons, did not provide detailed information on how their investigators managed to elude screeners. The government doesn't want to create a how-to manual for would-be terrorists. However, the information in the report, which was released last week, suggests our skies are far from safe. But then anyone who flies regularly could have told Congress as much.

Rules adopted in 2006 to stop travelers from bringing on board large quantities of liquids and gels are, in my own experience, inconsistently enforced. I've had lipstick and prescription eye drops confiscated in some airports when I failed to put them in the requisite quart-sized plastic bag, while at others I've inadvertently passed security with a 16-ounce water bottle in my carry-on bag. In some airports, a metal rosary crucifix in my briefcase has been enough to alarm screeners, while at others a small pocketknife and nail scissors have passed muster.

It doesn't help that screeners at many airports seem more interested in carrying on personal conversations with each other than paying close attention to their jobs. They give off the impression that they don't take what they do seriously. These are relatively low-paid, low-skilled workers, not security experts, yet they are our first and last line of defense in keeping air travel safe.

And passengers are a big part of the problem. They're impatient and carry on far too much junk, including every imaginable technological device: cell phone, PDA, DVD player, MP3 player, headset, computer, digital camera and whatever else they can fit into two overstuffed bags. How can even a conscientious screener distinguish between a benign entertainment or communication gadget and one that can be used to detonate a bomb?

If we're really serious about security, we're going to have to put up with more inconvenience when we travel. Maybe there ought to be separate lines at security checkpoints for travelers who insist on bringing electronics on board, for example. We could man those lines with more skilled screeners. And of course we need better equipment that can sniff out dangerous liquids, no matter how well disguised as everyday toiletries or other innocuous materials. The GAO recommended similar measures in its report.

We know the terrorists are planning future attacks on airplanes, and we have a good idea they will improvise bombs using liquids and detonators. A plot to do just that was interrupted in Great Britain in August 2006, which led to the current restrictions on liquids and gels. We can't become complacent just because we've had no attacks in six years. Both World Trade Center plots were several years in the making.

But the bottom line is that we have to be willing to put up with inconvenience if we are to remain safe. I would hate it if I couldn't take all my gadgets on planes but I would adjust, as would most travelers, if some devices were prohibited. Somehow we managed to fly cross-country without iPods and Bose headsets or even cell phones, PDAs and computers for many years. Surely we can learn to limit ourselves to carrying only one or two such devices on board if it meant we'd get through the lines quicker.

We can't blame the government for not keeping us safe if we're not willing to do our part as well.

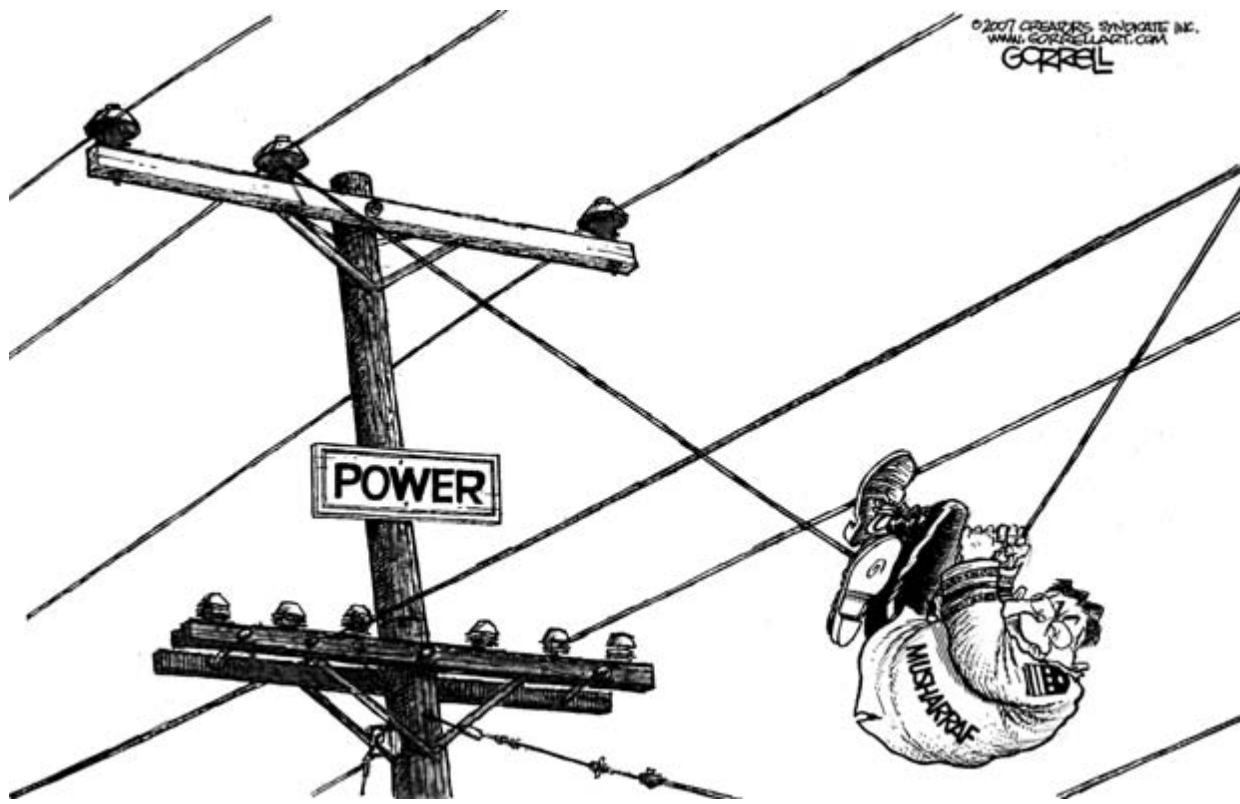
Linda Chavez is the author of "An Unlikely Conservative: The Transformation of an Ex-Liberal" and a columnist with Creators Syndicate.

From the Bible

"Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name.

For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness to all generations."

Psalm 100:4-5



The power of belief

Curiously, it was the death of a committed Christian believer the other day that got me thinking about non-believers.

Bear with me a moment here. The Christian believer to whom I refer was a longtime member of my Episcopal parish in Dallas. His name was — is, taking account of his recent enlistment in the communion of saints — Dick Buckingham Granger. He contracted Alzheimer's a few years ago, dying at last at age 90.

A principal reason for remembering Dick, aside from the gentleness of his spirit, is his extraordinary capacity for service to those he encountered in the course of a long life. Mind, I don't mean plain old service: show up where someone's waiting for you, work an hour or two, go home with a glow. I mean Christian service — the kind that proceeds from theological commitment, not the I-want-to kind of commitment but the I-must-because-I-must kind. Dick's gift and aptitude was for the I-must kind.

Bear with me, I said. I'll tell you in a moment why that kind of service matters so profoundly.

I knew and watched Dick for about 30 years. Couldn't take my eyes off him, actually. If there are such things as Christian dynamos, that is the thing he was. Meeting some poor neighborhood kids one Sunday morning years ago, he tended to their necessities but didn't stop there. He scraped together a kind of personal ministry to the Hispanics of the neighborhood. He went around, got to know the neighbors, got to know their needs, figured out ways to get those needs met, and then met them with the assistance of the parish and members thereof who caught, then latched onto, his vision.

He found neighbors who were sick, neighbors who needed help with bills or food or clothing or the Lord only knew what. Clearly he couldn't do everything. He wasn't God. He understood himself to be answering the call of God. It was enough.

Nor did neighborhood ministry set the bounds of Dick's commitment. He coordinated the packing of Christmas baskets for the poor, served food to the homeless, and I don't know what all else. A cyclist and runner, he offered intercessory prayer for others even as he rode or ran. His friends couldn't believe all he did. I used to say, "If you don't want something done, don't ask Dick to do it!" He delivered in spades — always.

Inexcusable animal brutality evidenced in Lampasas

What is this world coming to that a person's animals can be so brutally poisoned! [See page 1 story in today's edition and ad in Friday's Dispatch Record re: hog poisonings.] The type of poison that was used caused the animals to die by suffocation. This is pure premeditated murder.

All domesticated animals are totally dependent upon us humans to provide them with food, water and medical care. We, in America, boast of being good examples of human rights. Well, Lampasas County, we have an inhumane murderer in our midst.

I was raised in the country and know full well how devastating this is both financially and psychologically. It really is quite funny that six hogs on 10 acres created a foul odor. Lee Vann raised hogs for years,



William Murchison

Now, why does all this bring non-believers to mind? In part because the expanding non-belief community has elected lately to get in all our faces with assertions of God as a nullity, a delusion, a joke, a waste of precious time.

You've seen, maybe read, The New York Times bestsellers — Christopher Hitchens', Richard Dawkins', Sam Harris' — and their often-sulfurous contempt for religion spilling over from every page. There's even the children's fiction of the God-denying Englishman Philip Pullman. God? Oh, puh-leeze, spare us! Science, my friend, science, numbers, formulas, microscopes — it's all there is, all that's real.

Yes. Well. One thing I'd been wondering about, nevertheless: Do you get a sharper poke in the direction of faith, hope and love from Dawkins, say, than from Dick? A more convincing nudge from Harris than from the Sermon on the Mount, or the Law and the Prophets, where you tend to find what it's all for — indeed what everything is for?

No one would deny, I trust, the good works that have flowed from particular agents and carriers of non-belief. Not many, I hope, forget that whereas non-belief scribbles hypotheses and postulates (things not at all bad, in and of themselves), belief marshals the power of the mind and the spirit, building hospitals and orphanages and schools, caring for the dying and the imprisoned, showing mercy and pity in the name of that belief for which non-belief feels such high-minded disdain.

The Age of Dawkins? No way. It's the Age of Dick. It's always indeed the Age of Dick — and of believers who, from that first instinct to believe in something greater than themselves, go forth to strive and to do.

William Murchison is a columnist with Creators Syndicate.

Letters

and I can honestly say I did not smell an obnoxious smell when passing by, going to the VFW, or while working at the county show barn.

Gone are the times when you lived and let live and respected other people and their property.

Jo Spivey

Letters Policy

The Lampasas Dispatch Record encourages letters from its readers. Letters should be to the point, typed if at all possible, and signed. Address and telephone number also should be included for verification purposes. Only one letter per writer will be considered in a 60-day period.

Letters will be printed on a space-available basis. Letters should stick with issues and not simply be personal attacks. Letters endorsing a particular position on issues of local interest will be accepted, however letters endorsing a candidate for political office will not be accepted.

We reserve the right to edit for length, content and potentially libelous statements. Correspondence should be mailed to:

Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 631, Lampasas, TX 76550. Or send an opinion via e-mail to letters@lampasasdispatchrecord.com.

David Limbaugh



Democrats wedded to defeat in Iraq

Listening to the Democrats denying our progress in Iraq is reminiscent of a high school debate where one team gets stuck with the wrong side of the issue and has to defend it valiantly anyway. But in real life, especially when life-and-death consequences are involved, such artificial, unreasonable positions are not valiant but disgraceful.

On Fox News Sunday, Chris Wallace asked Democratic presidential candidate Bill Richardson whether his plan to withdraw all troops from Iraq was outdated now that the surge "shows signs of working." Wallace noted that U.S. casualties for October were the lowest since March 2006 and civilian casualties, murders and roadside bomb attacks have all fallen dramatically.

Straight-faced, Richardson replied, "First of all, I don't believe the surge is working. ...You don't measure progress by body counts."

Oh? You sure could have fooled Richardson's fellow Democrats who used that yardstick with a vengeance prior to the surge.

But that was before the facts became inconvenient. Since the surge has been working, many Democrats have shifted the goal posts to say we may only measure our progress by political successes.

Political progress was not what Sen. Harry Reid had in mind when he declared the Iraq War lost. It's not what other Democrats were stressing when ceaselessly bludgeoning us with news of daily body counts. That was so yesterday. Richardson, along with other Democrats, now says, "There is no progress in political compromise. The Maliki government has failed to make that happen in dividing up all revenues. Three out of 18 benchmarks by the General Accounting Office have shown that it is a failure."

So if the new struggling government hasn't achieved final legislative compromises on issues that would be exceedingly difficult for an established government, let alone an infant one, our mission in Iraq is a failure? Using that criterion, we must declare the American Revolution and our experiment in constitutional republicanism failures as well, since the modern Democratic Party won't even compromise to get behind a war we're currently winning.

It apparently never occurs to these enlightened liberals that in certain situations, the successful use of force is a condition precedent to political compromise — a principle on full display with Iraqi tribal leaders finally turning on al-Qaeda.

But what is Richardson's proposed political solution? Simple. We should "use the leverage of our withdrawal responsibly over a 12-month period but push the United States diplomacy" toward a power-sharing compromise among "the three groups in Iraq."

"Leverage of our withdrawal"? I'm sure our threats to withdraw will scare al-Qaeda and insurgent groups into scampering to the peace table.

But why pick on Richardson? He's just one of an overwhelming majority of Democrats taking this position. Anti-war liberal darling Markos Moulitsas of the Daily Kos website recently expressed similar denial of the surge's success. He said on Bill Maher's show that while the numbers may look better now in Iraq, it will only be a matter of time before things go to hell again. These people will go to any lengths to avoid admitting a Bush policy is working, though their protests are much less credible than a high school debater's.

That said, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was doubtlessly a better debater than Bill Richardson. Pelosi gleefully rushed to the podium last week to lament that no matter what the monthly casual statistics show, 2007 is the deadliest year in Iraq yet for American troops. You must admit that Pelosi exhibits impressive resourcefulness in spinning numbers to deny the very encouraging trends across the board in Iraq and to justify her inalterable predisposition against the war.

Democrats are stuck in a time warp and are irreversibly wedded to defeat in Iraq — there's simply no more tactful way of saying it.

Former Democrat Sen. Joe Lieberman agrees. He said that since retaking Congress in November 2006, "the top foreign policy priority of the Democratic Party ... has been to pull our troops out of Iraq, to abandon the democratically elected government there and to hand a defeat to President Bush. "Democrats have remained emotionally invested in a narrative of defeat and retreat in Iraq, reluctant to acknowledge the progress we are now achieving."

The Democrats' unifying motto should be, to paraphrase the late John Lennon, "All we are saying is give defeat a chance."

David Limbaugh is a writer, author and attorney. His twice-weekly commentary is distributed by Creators Syndicate.

Thank you for reading the Lampasas Dispatch Record