

January 7, 2010

Today's Pickings examines in detail the case in favor of profiling. It started with Tunku Varadarajan and Bret Stephens who both wrote on the subject. Then David Warren showed up with a fascinating piece that wandered around some before making some very good points. (That's kinda his style. Isn't it?) Later David Harsanyi hopped on. To set the tone, we start with Roger Simon who wishes to call a spade a spade.

And, by the way, this coming weekend the NY Times Magazine has a nicely balanced look at the Florida race for U. S. Senate between Crist and Rubio. At 8,000 words it's too long for us here, so if you want to read it you must follow this link.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/10/magazine/10florida-t.html?ref=magazine&pagewanted=print>

Roger Simon blogs about the effectiveness of the euphemisms currently circulating.

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But we all know that the "War on Terror" is actually a euphemism for the "War on Radical Islam." But nobody says it. Nobody official anyway. (Bush did say something like that once in a speech, as I recall, but was quickly shouted down by the nabobs of political correctness.) ...

...I know there are those who thought that this soft-pedaling of this war would calm down the Islamic world and make things go away, but by now events have shown them to be wrong. From Sana'a to Somalia, from Detroit to Ft. Hood, and most importantly on the streets of Tehran, things have by now, if anything, heated up, morphing to new, and often more complicated, locations.

Yet still we dare not speak the name of the War on Radical Islam. Still we fear to offend. Perhaps we need a new euphemism. For now I would suggest the "War on Ourselves." It looks to be becoming dangerously successful.

David Warren discusses political correctness related to smoking and stereotyping. This article may be hazardous for liberal sensibilities (or insensibilities, as it were).

...But there is hope. Conditions have now got so bad, from the 99 per cent of damage that is inflicted not by terrorists but by the cumbersome bureaucracies responding to them (100 per cent in this case), that we are now reading "mainstream" articles about how the Israelis handle airport security -- with total success, against much greater threats, at lower cost, with no flight delays.

This is encouraging: people are actually discussing what works. I did notice several of the articles, though well-researched in other respects, carefully avoided mentioning the key element in the Israeli security strategy, which is: open ethnic, religious, demographic, and behavioural profiling.

It is not something anyone wants to do. It is just something that has to be done if we are going to avoid being slaughtered by terrorists.

And though we may not yet be talking about the issue directly, the cracks are appearing in the wall of political correctness, which means it might eventually come down. ...

[Tunku Varadarajan's](#) article on security and politics is full of interesting points from beginning to end. Here are a few highlights:

...Next, make it more cumbersome for people in countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to get a U.S. visa, and institute an immediate review of all visas issued to males under 40 from the 14 countries. Revoke all those that don't pass a "smell test." As Abdulmutallab demonstrated, a U.S. visa is a precious al Qaeda asset. ...

...We have to create—increasingly—two classes of traveler, those that get normal checks and those that are subject to intensive checks. Inevitably, this will open up fissures, but these are fissures we must learn to live with. As Melik Kaylan [wrote](#) recently, " the world will likely undergo a period of de-integration or rather a new kind of integration in which mutually sympathetic cultures grow actively closer while others get slowly excluded." Eventually, if the pressure is applied long enough, the innocent majority in the watch-list countries will decide that it is in their own interest to root out the radical Islamists. ... It is likely that certain countries will not get off the list for decades, which may mean that they don't care enough, or are just too ramshackle and corrupt, to get their house in order. ...

...To conclude, there are three under-acknowledged factors involved here, all of them cultural in character (and our culture inclines us to overlook them). First, when the White House and Congress are in Democratic hands, a slight and silent sense goes out over all the bureaucracy that national security is not all that important or interesting. Second: Bureaucracies reward inertia and do not punish ignorance. They are also—no news here—deeply compartmentalized. Three: Every educated American under the age of about 40 has been indoctrinated into the view that the worst thing imaginable is to be judgmental, because to make a judgment is, per se, to be intolerant.

Put all these together and you have a society almost perfectly unable to discern deadly threats to its existence—a society in which, it would appear, profiling people is more odious than mass murder.

In the [WSJ](#), [Bret Stephens](#) looks at the political correctness that is incapacitating the nation's security.

When does a civilization become incompetent? I've been mulling the question in a number of contexts over the last year, including our inability to put a stop to Somali piracy, detain a terrorist who can neither be charged nor released, think rationally about climate change, or rebuild Ground Zero in an acceptable time frame. ...

...a civilization becomes incompetent not only when it fails to learn the lessons of its past, but also when it becomes crippled by them. ...

...we reject profiling on the commendable grounds that human beings ought not to be treated as statistical probabilities. But at some point, the failure to profile puts innocent lives recklessly at risk. We also abhor waterboarding for the eminently decent reason that it borders on torture. But there are worse things than waterboarding—like allowing another 9/11 to unfold because we recoil at the means necessary to prevent it. ...

...Put simply, we do not acquit ourselves morally by trying to abstain from a choice of evils. We just allow the nearest evil to make the choice for us.

[David Harsanyi](#) once again shows how to make a joke and a point at the same time.

When comedian Joan Rivers was booted off a flight from Costa Rica to Newark this past weekend, it was not because she had perpetrated crimes against the human appearance. Rather, it was because she was a potential security risk. ...

...Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the crotch bomber, was, according to the president, an "isolated extremist" — which is true, if he means the extremism is isolated to a few million people.

Then, Obama went on to talk about the "crushing poverty" of Yemen, insinuating that neediness was a root of man-caused disasters — though the underwear bomber came from a wealthy and educated family and the "crushing poverty" of Haiti has yet to compel those nation's young men to stuff explosives down their pants. ...

[Karl Rove](#) gives the skinny on Obama's fat budget.

After President Obama devoted much of 2009 to health care and global warming—two issues far down Americans' list of concerns—the White House says he will pivot to jobs and deficit reduction in his State of the Union speech in a few weeks. The White House is considering dramatic gestures, perhaps announcing a spending freeze or even a 2% or 3% reduction in nondefense spending.

But Americans shouldn't be misled by the election year ploy: Mr. Obama rigged the game by giving himself plenty of room to look tough on spending. He did that by increasing discretionary domestic spending for the last half of fiscal year 2009 by 8% and then increasing it another 12% for fiscal year 2010.

So discretionary domestic spending now stands at \$536 billion, up nearly 24% from President George W. Bush's last full year budget in fiscal 2008 of \$433.6 billion. That's a huge spending surge, even for a profligate liberal like Mr. Obama. The \$102 billion spending increase doesn't even count the \$787 billion stimulus package, of which \$534 billion remains unspent. ...

[Stephen Spruiel](#) posts a depressing chart in the Corner. It's about the number of people working for governments.

[Jonah Goldberg](#), in [USA Today](#), comments on liberal aspirations.

... "Leftward ho!" Alter proclaimed.

A little more than a year later, we surely have been hoing leftward. But it already seems as if the American people are sick of it. The [2009 off-year elections](#) might not have been a repudiation of Obama, but they were definitely not an embrace of Obamaism. Meanwhile, by nearly 2 to 1, Americans say [the country is on the wrong track](#). Obama's [approval ratings](#) have slumped severely. Independent voters have abandoned the Democrats. The only populist fervor out there is fueling the anti-tax, pro-limited government, "Tea Party" movement, which is now more popular than either the GOP or the Democrats. Even last spring, when anti-Wall Street fervor was justifiably high, more Americans viewed "big government" as a bigger threat to the country than "big business."

Obama's signature domestic policy goal, health care reform, is [decidedly unpopular](#) with a majority of Americans. And a Rasmussen Reports poll last week finds that [70% of respondents](#) either support waterboarding the Christmas bomber suspect or are unsure whether we should. Only 30% subscribe to Obama's position. And that's after an unsuccessful terrorist attack. ...

In [Forbes](#), [Joel Kotkin](#) discusses the economic and demographic woes of blue states.

...Other key sectors are also flailing. Political influence in Washington will not stem the flow of high-wage trading jobs away from the Mercantile Exchange to decentralized electronic exchanges. Nor can it reverse the [deteriorating state fiscal crisis](#) caused by weak economies and exacerbated by insanely high pensions and out of control spending policies. Late last month [Moody's](#) and [S&P](#) downgraded the debt ranking for the State of Illinois. Of course, such fiscal malaise is not limited to Chicago or Illinois. True blue California has an even worse debt rating. New York, another blue bastion, is also just about out of cash. ...

...Other blue bastions have been shedding jobs as well, both during the recession and over the whole decade. Beyond Chicago and Detroit, the biggest losses among the mega-regions have taken place in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles-Long Beach and Boston. Big money can still be made in Silicon Valley, Hollywood or around the academic economy of Boston, but in terms of overall jobs, the past decade has been dismal for these regions. Meanwhile, the consistent big gainers have been--besides Houston--Dallas and Washington, D.C., the one place money really does seem to grow on trees. Even Miami, Phoenix and San Bernardino-Riverside, in California, boast more jobs today than in 2000, despite significant setbacks in the recent recession.

These trends coincide with continuing shifts in demographics. The recession may have slowed the pace of net migration, but the essential pattern has remained in place. People continue to leave places like New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles for more affordable, economically viable regions like Houston, Dallas, Austin and San Antonio. Overall, the big winners in net migration have been predominately conservative states like Texas--with over 800,000 net new migrants--notes demographer [Wendell Cox](#). In what Cox calls "the decade of the South," 90% of all net migration went to southern states. ...

Yesterday we had much about intellectuals and the way they think. [This from the Corner](#) is a piece of that.

... I've seen a lot of "Worst Quote" features on other right-leaning sites, featuring howlers from the President, Pelosi, Evan Thomas, Chris Matthews, Andrea Mitchell, [Whoopi Goldberg](#).

All of them leave out what was to me the most chilling quote, uttered by one [Ruth Bader Ginsburg](#) in response to a New York Times Magazine question about lack of Medicaid funding for abortions:"Yes, the ruling about that surprised me. [Harris v. McRae—in 1980 the court upheld the Hyde Amendment, which forbids the use of Medicaid for abortions.] Frankly I had thought that at the time Roe was decided, there was concern about population growth and particularly growth in populations that we don't want to have too many of." ...

For an idea of how cold it has been around the world, we have some of the [weather related headlines from Drudge](#).

Roger L. Simon

The Terror War and the Double-Euphemism

It should be no real surprise that the relatively-unknown John O. Brennan – rather than putative Homeland Security boss Janet Napolitano – was called upon to defend the administration against Dick Cheney’s criticism of terror war weakness on the talk show circuit Sunday. Napolitano has probably disqualified herself forever with her inane comment that the “system worked” on December 25.

Still, [Brennan’s defense](#) was pretty lame – no more than insisting that Obama was strong on terror because, well, Brennan says so and he’s an expert. Well, expert or not, I can safely predict he will be completely ignored outside the punditocracy. Even there, he won’t get a lot of attention. Reason? No one *really* believes Brennan, not even the president’s staunch defenders who watch nervously as their leader’s poll numbers tank at a record speed.

And why should they? If they are faintly honest with themselves, they know that the president has never been terribly interested in the War on Terror, almost to the point of wishing it would go away. Last March, in an [interview](#) with *Der Spiegel*, his same Homeland Security secretary equated the “t-word” with “man-caused disasters,” of all euphemisms, as if terror acts were similar to someone forgetting a rivet on a bridge.

Not that the “War on Terror” is an accurate appellation in the first place. “Man-caused disasters” is actually a *euphemism of a euphemism*, because the “War on Terror” itself has no real meaning. Terror is a method, not an end or a place. Fighting a “War on Terror” is like fighting a War on Cannons or Airplanes. Meaningless.

But we all know that the “War on Terror” is actually a euphemism for the “War on Radical Islam.” But nobody says it. Nobody official anyway. (Bush did say something like that *once* in a speech, as I recall, but was quickly shouted down by the nabobs of political correctness.)

Does this matter? Well, in two words... Hell, yes! Using euphemisms to describe what we are doing in this instance assures that we will continue doing it for years and decades to come. It does this by telling our troops in this war – from the soldiers in the field to the intelligence officers in Langley to our own people in the cities and towns of America, whose support is the most crucial of all – that we are fundamentally unserious, that we think this is all an unimportant issue that is better off ignored. The president’s campaign message got through this once. He ran on soft-pedaling the War on Terror. That was one part of the “hope and change” we all understood.

I know there are those who thought that this soft-pedaling of this war would calm down the Islamic world and make things go away, but by now events have shown them to be wrong. From Sana’a to Somalia, from Detroit to Ft. Hood, and most importantly on the streets of Tehran, things have by now, if anything, heated up, morphing to new, and often more complicated, locations.

Yet still we dare not speak the name of the War on Radical Islam. Still we fear to offend. Perhaps we need a new euphemism. For now I would suggest the “War on Ourselves.” It looks to be becoming dangerously successful.

Ottawa Citizen

Courage to say what everyone knows

by David Warren

According to an item that appeared yesterday on the BBC website, giving up smoking may sharply increase the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

The connection between this and airport security -- my topic du jour -- might not be readily apparent. So let me explain.

The BBC story is politically incorrect. Smoking is supposed to be always bad for you; giving it up always good. That is what political correctness demands, and therefore studies which show the contrary must be suppressed or ignored. (It's the same thing with "anthropogenic global warming," and a few hundred other topics.)

I personally doubt smoking is always good for you, and I generally recommend against taking it up. But whether it has benefits or not, there has in fact been an accumulation of evidence that suddenly giving up smoking, after decades through which your metabolism has been adapting to tar and nicotine, might be rather more dangerous than continuing to smoke.

An open mind will examine evidence, whether the risk is health or security. It will not allow itself to be blindsided by the requirements of anybody's propaganda. It will certainly work from hunches and expectations, but it will also subject its own assumptions to skeptical review.

"Western Civ" became rich and powerful, but also remarkably free and humane, out of this very habit of playing "devil's advocate" with itself. This has been, for 20 centuries now, innate even to the theological reasoning of the Church to which I belong (the Roman one).

Let's put this in the plainest language. The first thing the Devil tries to do, when invading an intellectual organism, is get rid of the "devil's advocate." He needs people who are afraid to think.

The first thing political correctness attempts is to suppress any genuine inquiry or debate. Instead, by the threat of personal contumely and ostracism, it instills a neurotic compulsion to avoid contradicting the "correct" political line. This must necessarily be a powerful neurosis: for the ideas which animate "progressive" or "left-wing" people tend to disintegrate on contact with common sense.

Here's a little exercise I learned from a friend. Repeat after me: "The problem with stereotypes is that they're all true!" (It's just a breathing exercise.)

That smoking item on the BBC -- itself an intensely "PC" institution -- can thus be taken as a sign of the times. It is one of many glinting indications I have seen in "mainstream" media, lately, that freedom of thought may be returning.

I mention this at an angle to the most spectacular indication. It was triggered by some Nigerian Islamist, who ("allegedly") tried to take down an airliner on its approach to Detroit, Christmas day. So far, ho hum -- that's the sort of thing Islamists are always trying to do. So why is it news?

After all, President Obama's homeland security chief, the unbelievably incompetent but assiduously PC Janet Napolitano, twice announced, "the system worked."

What she could only mean by this is, that after the total failure of massive bureaucratic measures to prevent the boarding of a man they'd been directly warned to look out for, passengers aboard the flight tackled him. The terrorist was thus prevented from detonating his binary "knicker bomb." Better yet, he was left with painful burns.

Don't laugh. His mission was a complete success. By pulling that one little stunt, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, 23, from Lagos, Nigeria, by way of Yemen, was able to snarl Christmas and New Year's traffic through airports all over the world, and especially across North America. He was able to induce the unbelievably incompetent Janet Napolitano to immediately introduce several new layers of utterly useless air security regulations, which in turn backed up vast crowds of air travellers, thus making them ripe targets for any suicide bomber.

But there is hope. Conditions have now got so bad, from the 99 per cent of damage that is inflicted not by terrorists but by the cumbersome bureaucracies responding to them (100 per cent in this case), that we are now reading "mainstream" articles about how the Israelis handle airport security -- with total success, against much greater threats, at lower cost, with no flight delays.

This is encouraging: people are actually discussing what works. I did notice several of the articles, though well-researched in other respects, carefully avoided mentioning the key element in the Israeli security strategy, which is: open ethnic, religious, demographic, and behavioural profiling.

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Later, we might want to return to the actual risks of smoking. But for now, we should deal with our mass apocalyptic death problem.

Daily Beast

[Profiling Whole Nations](#)

The new policy requiring stepped-up security for some countries is a start, but we won't be safe until Obama cuts the political correctness—and takes far tougher steps.

by Tunku Varadarajan

The Obama administration has announced that citizens of 14 selected countries—as well as travelers whose itineraries have taken them through any of these countries—will be subjected to enhanced scrutiny before they board planes to the United States, including full-body pat-downs. The countries comprise four "state sponsors of terrorism" (Cuba, Iran, Sudan, and Syria) and 10 "countries of interest," a euphemism for terrorist breeding grounds. These last are Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and Yemen.

If this new security policy is an indication—however embryonic—that the president is beginning to get serious about tackling Islamist terrorism, then millions of Americans will permit themselves a glimmer of gratitude. Let's call it the "Underwear Dividend," after Farouk Omar Abdulmutallab, the Nigerian who was apprehended in mid-air on Christmas Day with a bomb secreted in his nether parts.

On a macro level, one has to wonder about the commitment of a president who invariably prefers to use the word "radical" to describe a "terrorist," and whose secretary for Homeland Security cannot easily bring herself to utter the word "terrorism," preferring instead a phrase—"man-caused disasters"—that should make most American jaws drop. (Of course, it may be that the one way to ensure a grassroots Democrats clamor for action against terrorism is to call it "anthropogenic"...)

The macro story is, alas, one of broader ideology, which tends to remain fixed in the course of an administration. We cannot expect Obama to fight terrorism with the zeal of a Bush, especially when it's clear that he regards his predecessor as a destructive Ahab obsessed with an Islamist "Moby-Dick." Obama is Starbuck, not merely more pragmatic than Ahab but immeasurably wiser: His mission is to keep the Pequod—America—out of harm's way.

No, President Obama cannot change his natural course, so the best we hope for is a minimization of political correctness in the daily, practical matter of keeping us secure from Islamist terrorists. So whereas any formal use of "profiling" as a tool may be politically unthinkable, we have made a useful start with this latest list of tainted countries.

Of course, the great majority of Muslims—whether here or abroad—are peaceable, and it is devilishly difficult to design a protective system that separates murderous jihadis from a nonviolent majority without chafing against some civil liberties. But the question many now ask is whether we are worrying too much about those liberties and not enough about saving lives.

Obama cannot say, formally, that our most pressing problem is with Islamist terrorism, even though incidents of terrorism by non-Muslims are trivial these days. And as we, as a society, are still bound fast to our proprieties, we cannot formally say that we are afraid of radicalized Muslims getting on planes to kill us. We cannot, formally, segregate Muslim passengers from the rest in airport security. We cannot, formally, say that the intellectual author of this terrorism is Saudi Arabia, and the main logistical base is Pakistan. Why, these last two are our dear friends. However, we have put those countries on a tainted list; and the taint is a soft form of profiling, since we really do not trust people who fly to America from those two countries. If we can't profile people, we can, it seems, profile entire nations.

A few practical proposals, going forward: Why not station police on board all flights? El Al, which adheres to such a practice, has not had an on-air incident in three decades. (Edward Jay Epstein made precisely such a suggestion, two weeks after September 11, 2001, in an op-ed in The Wall Street Journal.)

Next, make it more cumbersome for people in countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to get a U.S. visa, and institute an immediate review of all visas issued to males under 40 from the 14 countries. Revoke all those that don't pass a "smell test." As Abdulmutallab demonstrated, a U.S. visa is a precious al Qaeda asset. In the same vein, introduce a form to be filled by all who pass through immigration at U.S. (air)ports, one that asks all travelers—irrespective of where they arrive from—if they have visited any of the countries on the list in the last two years. If they have, they must state the purpose of their visit. (How else do we scrutinize, say, the Dutch national of Somali origin who may have been in Somalia with the Islamist "Shabaab" six months ago, but who is, in this instance, flying directly to New York from The Hague? People will lie, but subsequent detection will help in deportation, or prosecution.)

We have to create—increasingly—two classes of traveler, those that get normal checks and those that are subject to intensive checks. Inevitably, this will open up fissures, but these are fissures we must learn to live with. As Melik Kaylan wrote recently, "the world will likely undergo a period of de-integration or rather a new kind of integration in which mutually sympathetic cultures grow actively closer while others get slowly excluded." Eventually, if the pressure is applied long enough, the innocent majority in the watch-list countries will decide that it is in their own interest to root out the radical Islamists. In any event, the list shrinks the umbra of anonymity in which jihadists conceal themselves. It is likely that certain countries will not get off the list for decades, which may mean that they don't care enough, or are just too ramshackle and corrupt, to get their house in order. It may also mean that they are perennial enemies. Pertinent, here, is the one silver lining in the Abdulmutallab case: that the father reported his own son to the authorities. We have to encourage such people to go after their own fanatics.

Finally, we have to accept that this isn't a problem that can be solved through ever-increasing security measures. It is, as Robert Kagan has written in the latest issue of World Affairs, a problem that requires a robust combination of political and military responses. Perhaps some Democrats may even learn that Islamist jihad has a pedigree that predates George W. Bush.

Another part of our response should be to counter the spread of radical Islam in the West, particularly in prisons, where proselytizers have access to people who are vulnerable to being "saved." These are the sleepers who threaten us at home. We can tighten visas and other forms of restrictions to hinder the very active and well-funded missionary work done in the West by Islamist groups drawing upon personnel, money, and ideas from tainted countries. It won't be fully effective, but it would make it easier for the moderate, civilized majority to fight the conflict within the Muslim community against the better-subsidized fanatics.

To conclude, there are three under-acknowledged factors involved here, all of them cultural in character (and our culture inclines us to overlook them). First, when the White House and Congress are in Democratic

hands, a slight and silent sense goes out over all the bureaucracy that national security is not all that important or interesting. Second: Bureaucracies reward inertia and do not punish ignorance. They are also—no news here—deeply compartmentalized. Three: Every educated American under the age of about 40 has been indoctrinated into the view that the worst thing imaginable is to be judgmental, because to make a judgment is, per se, to be intolerant.

Put all these together and you have a society almost perfectly unable to discern deadly threats to its existence—a society in which, it would appear, profiling people is more odious than mass murder.

Tunku Varadarajan is a national affairs correspondent and writer at large for The Daily Beast. He is also a research fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution and a professor at NYU's Stern Business School.

WSJ

Our Incompetent Civilization

Sometimes we have to choose between evils.

by Bret Stephens

When does a civilization become incompetent? I've been mulling the question in a number of contexts over the last year, including our inability to put a stop to Somali piracy, detain a terrorist who can neither be charged nor released, think rationally about climate change, or rebuild Ground Zero in an acceptable time frame.

But the question came to me again in Brussels on Sunday as I watched my children—ages six, four, and four months—get patted down before boarding our U.S.-bound flight. The larger-than-allowed bottle of cough syrup in my carry-on, however, somehow escaped our screener's humorless attentions.

Yes, the screener in this case was Belgian, not American. Yes, terrorists come in any number of skin colors, and they aren't above strapping explosives to their own children. And yes, the Obama administration took a half-step toward sanity by ordering additional screening of passengers from 14 countries, including Yemen, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, home of Flight 253 would-be bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab.

But here's a predictive certainty: Not one non-Muslim from any of these countries (or others such as Egypt or Jordan, which were oddly excluded from the list) will ever become a suicide bomber. The localized case of Sri Lanka's Tamils aside, suicide bombing is a purely Islamic phenomenon. Note that during the whole of the intifada there was not a single case of a Palestinian Christian blowing himself up, making a nonsense of the view that Israel's checkpoints and curfews and security fences were the main cause of the terror.

So as Homeland Security, TSA and the rest of the government's counterterrorism apparatus struggle to upgrade travel security in a way that doesn't involve freeze-drying passengers in their seats, it's worth noting that we have finally reached the outer bounds of a politically correct approach to airport security. To wit, the U.S. government is now going to profile Muslim passengers, albeit partially, indirectly and via the euphemism of nationality instead of religion. Insofar as actual security is concerned, it would be both more honest and effective if it dropped the remaining pretense.

The obvious rub is that profiling goes against the American grain. We shudder at the memory of previous instances of it, particularly the internment of Japanese-Americans in the 1940s. Rightly so.

But a civilization becomes incompetent not only when it fails to learn the lessons of its past, but also when it becomes crippled by them. Modern Germany, to pick an example, has learned from its Nazi past to eschew chauvinism and militarism. So far, so good. But today's Multikulti Germany, with its negative birth rate, bloated welfare state and pacifist and ecological obsessions is a dismal rejoinder to its own history. It is conceivable that within a century Germans may actually loathe themselves out of existence.

In the U.S., our civilizational incompetence takes various forms. For instance: No country in the world collects more extensive statistical data about its own population than the U.S. And no country is as conflicted about the uses to which that data may or may not be put than the U.S. So what exactly is the point of all this measuring, collating and parsing?

Our deeper incompetence stems from an inability to recognize the proper limits to our own virtues; to forget, as Aristotle cautioned, that even good things "bring harm to many people; for before now men have been undone by reason of their wealth, and others by reason of their courage."

Thus we reject profiling on the commendable grounds that human beings ought not to be treated as statistical probabilities. But at some point, the failure to profile puts innocent lives recklessly at risk. We also abhor waterboarding for the eminently decent reason that it borders on torture. But there are worse things than waterboarding—like allowing another 9/11 to unfold because we recoil at the means necessary to prevent it. Similarly, there are worse things than Guantanamo—like releasing terrorists to Yemen so they can murder and maim again (and so we can hope to take them out for good in a "clean" Predator missile strike).

Put simply, we do not acquit ourselves morally by trying to abstain from a choice of evils. We just allow the nearest evil to make the choice for us.

And so it goes. We can be proud of how deeply we mourn the losses of troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. But a nation that mourns too deeply ultimately becomes incapable of conducting a war of any description, whether for honor, interest or survival. We rightly care about the environment. But our neurotic obsession with carbon betrays an inability to distinguish between pollution and the stuff of life itself. We are a country of standards and laws. Yet we are moving perilously in the direction of abolishing notions of discretion and judgment.

One of life's paradoxes is that we are as often undone by our virtues as by our vices. And so it is with civilizations, ours not least.

Denver Post

[Flying with the enemy](#)

If there's a good way to stop terrorism, let's hear it.

By David Harsanyi

When comedian Joan Rivers was booted off a flight from Costa Rica to Newark this past weekend, it was not because she had perpetrated crimes against the human appearance. Rather, it was because she was a potential security risk.

In a recent column, my assertion that airport security should ignore most of us and focus on bad actors (not the Joan Rivers variety of bad actor, though one sympathizes) who tend to originate from disagreeable locales (not Hollywood) and affiliate themselves with a religious denomination (not Scientology), provoked a torrent of livid e-mails to land in my inbox."

One perturbed writer, an American Muslim, encapsulated the thoughts of many by accusing me of "encouraging ... racist profiling," calling that "inexcusable and ignorant." This sentiment was also found in the progressive blogosphere as a reaction to any mention of ethnic or religious profiling.

Evidently, the Barack Obama administration — despite unleashing a barrage of euphemistic

rationalizations — is also a nest of boorish, racist sentiment, as it instructed airports to profile travelers en route to the United States from 14 countries, most of which share some vague thematic connection. They include Pakistan, Yemen, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

It is a shame that anyone has to endure questioning or pat-downs or worse at airports, but the fact is that those who are behind terrorism have, by large margins, originated from these nations. (Islam, incidentally, is not a race, it is a faith, so there is nothing "racist" about criticizing it or its adherents, most of whom — need it be repeated — are peaceful.)

No serious person in this nation has insinuated that Islamic religious freedoms be infringed or curtailed. Yet, if these indignant letter-writers were interested in unearthing honest-to-goodness inexcusable ignorance, widespread dehumanization and institutionalized xenophobia, they could find it in abundance in any run-of-the-mill Muslim theocracy, monarchy or autocracy. There are many to choose from.

That reality, of course, is none of our business, as a matter of policy. Protecting citizens from foreign threats, on the other hand, is.

Understandably, this has unfurled a complex situation. Are we overreacting? What is an appropriate level of interrogation? When is war justified? What rights do enemy combatants have? Fair debates, no doubt.

But a person can oppose water boarding or war or foreign entanglements or nation building and still accept that certain countries and religions harbor "militants" — even if such militants make stopovers in Frankfurt.

Yet ... the excuse-making. The tiptoeing. Terrorism is now a "man-caused disaster." The Fort Hood terrorist was just stressed out after learning about a deployment to Iraq — you know, after he voluntarily joined the Army.

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the crotch bomber, was, according to the president, an "isolated extremist" — which is true, if he means the extremism is isolated to a few million people.

Then, Obama went on to talk about the "crushing poverty" of Yemen, insinuating that neediness was a root of man-caused disasters — though the underwear bomber came from a wealthy and educated family and the "crushing poverty" of Haiti has yet to compel those nation's young men to stuff explosives down their pants.

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee complained that singling out a group of people was "extreme and very dangerous. All of a sudden people are labeled as being related to terrorism just because of the nation they are from."

Well, I hate to break it to them, but Americans already relate terrorism to the nations that terrorists seem to always come from. And if there's a better way to keep extremists off planes, I'd love to hear it.

WSJ

[Obama's Fiscal Fantasy World](#)

Spending is up nearly 24% since Bush's last full budget year.

by Karl Rove

After President Obama devoted much of 2009 to health care and global warming—two issues far down Americans' list of concerns—the White House says he will pivot to jobs and deficit reduction in his State of the Union speech in a few weeks. The White House is considering dramatic gestures, perhaps announcing a spending freeze or even a 2% or 3% reduction in nondefense spending.

But Americans shouldn't be misled by the election year ploy: Mr. Obama rigged the game by giving himself plenty of room to look tough on spending. He did that by increasing discretionary domestic spending for the last half of fiscal year 2009 by 8% and then increasing it another 12% for fiscal year 2010.

So discretionary domestic spending now stands at \$536 billion, up nearly 24% from President George W. Bush's last full year budget in fiscal 2008 of \$433.6 billion. That's a huge spending surge, even for a profligate liberal like Mr. Obama. The \$102 billion spending increase doesn't even count the \$787 billion stimulus package, of which \$534 billion remains unspent.

Mr. Obama can placate congressional Democrats by arguing that all that extra spending he has already crammed through can cover their spending desires at least through the 2010 congressional elections.

Mr. Obama is thinking of tapping another pocket of cash. Now that the banks are repaying—with interest and dividends—the \$240 billion the Bush administration lent them, the Obama administration is considering recycling those dollars into new spending on "green" technology and more stimulus, despite provisions Congress wrote into the law creating the Troubled Asset Relief Program that requires that repaid TARP funds be used exclusively for deficit reduction.

Meanwhile, defense spending is being flattened: Between 2009 and 2010, military outlays will rise 3.6% while nondefense discretionary spending climbs 12%.

All this leaves Mr. Obama in the enviable position of appearing tough on spending while growing the federal government's share of GDP from its historic post-World War II average of roughly 20% to the target Mr. Obama laid out in his budget blueprint last February of 24%.

There are also those pesky entitlements. This mandatory spending has grown to 66% of the budget, up from 29% in 1965. Serious budgeters understand spending cannot be brought under control unless these mandatory outlays are part of the mix.

One idea on Capitol Hill is to create a commission that would propose a package of entitlement reforms that Congress would have to vote on as a package, up or down, take it or leave it—much like the base closing commission.

The Obama White House likes this idea in part because the proposal calls for including some congressional Republicans but would reserve a majority of the seats on the commission for Democrats. That would put Democrats in charge while also making the GOP share in the political pain that would come with whatever the commission proposes. Conservatives worry, with justification, that a commission's purpose would be to provide Republican cover for tax increases and a permanent increase in the size of the federal government.

What's more, the White House may only be interested in an election-year gesture. White House staff are apparently considering creating a presidential commission that would look like it's working on deficit reduction but that would be established by executive order. Of course, without congressional authorization, there's no way to force Congress to vote on a commission's recommendations.

Whatever Mr. Obama says in his State of the Union, Republicans need to be tougher on spending and deficits. Later this month, Senate Republicans are planning to force their colleagues to go on the record on how to spend returned TARP funds by demanding that Democrats vote on the issue. Some House Republicans are also considering calling for a return to the level of discretionary domestic spending that existed when Mr. Obama entered office last January.

Few things focus the attention of politicians as much as approaching elections. Democrats are aware that spending and deficits are big reasons Republicans have a nine-point lead on the Rasmussen Poll's generic ballot.

Independents are particularly sensitive about deficits, spending and taxes, whose growth they see aversely affecting jobs and the economy. They give Mr. Obama only a 21% approval on handling the deficit. Only 10% of independents want to spend unused bank bailout money on other government programs.

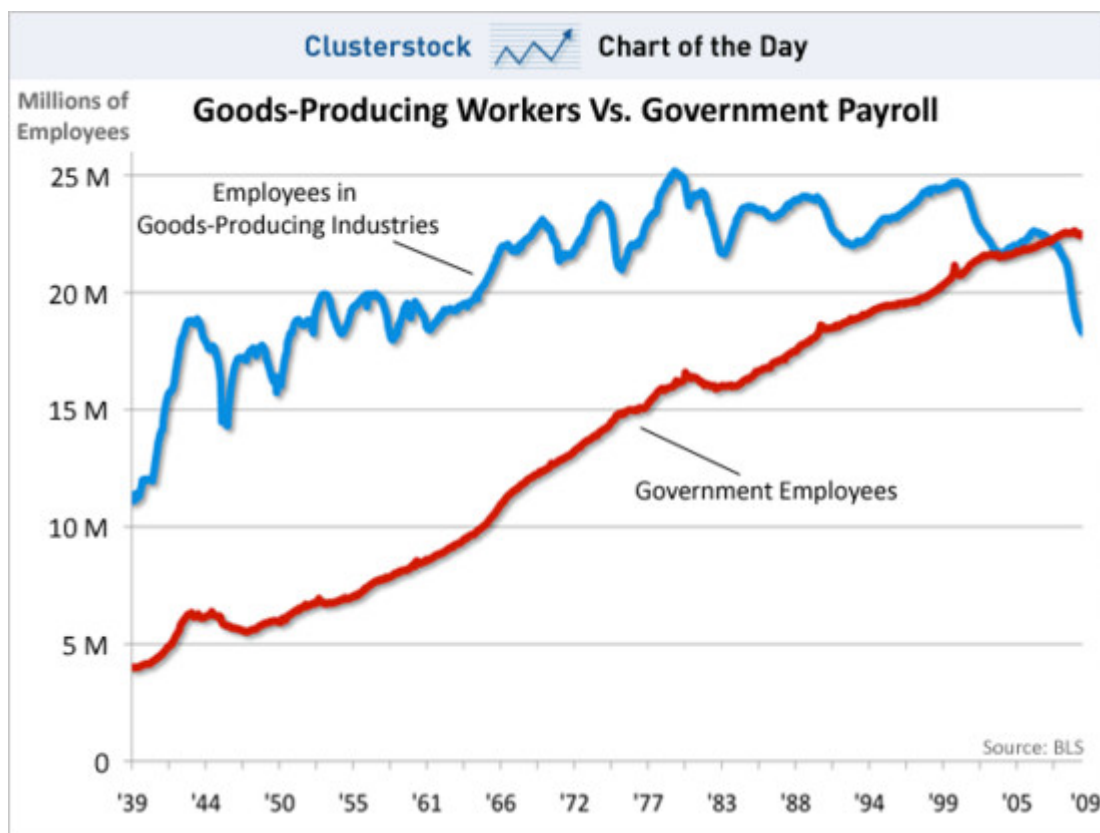
At the beginning of his term, Americans believed Mr. Obama would follow through on his campaign promises about "cutting wasteful spending" and going "through the federal budget, line-by-line, ending programs that we don't need" and putting "an end to the run-away spending the record deficits."

After a year of living in his fiscal fantasy world, Americans realize they have a record deficit-setting, budget-busting spender on their hands. Voters are now reading the fine print on all that Mr. Obama proposes and as they do, his credibility, already badly damaged, suffers.

The Corner

Government Jobs Have Overtaken Goods-Producing Jobs [Stephen Spruiell]

Goods-producing jobs — the blue line — include construction, manufacturing, mining and agriculture:



Of course, the goods-producing sectors have achieved large leaps in productivity (increasing output with fewer workers) over the same time frame. We don't have good statistics on public-sector productivity, but the [federal government](#) certainly doesn't seem to be doing more with less.

Source: [TBI](#).

USA Today

Liberalism, It's Hangover Time

America isn't eager to embrace Obama's 'leftward ho!' after all

by Jonah Goldberg

A year ago this month, the air over American liberalism was thick with champagne corks. Barack Obama the newly elected president was poised to be inaugurated, and he in turn would inaugurate the [long-prophesized new progressive era](#). A year later, the champagne corks are hardly flying, and if this is to be morning in America for American liberalism, it seems to have come with a pretty nasty hangover.

The notion that the left is owed its turn has been, for some, an immutable law of history.

For instance, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., the late activist-historian, argued in *The Cycles of American History* that every 30 years or so, America swings like a pendulum between government activism and conservatism, between emphasizing public purpose and private gain. The 1930s and the 1960s saw statism in the saddle; in the 1920s, 1950s and 1980s, markets were ascendant. Based on his (very simplistic) theory, Schlesinger predicted that the 1990s would be a new progressive decade like the 1960s and 1930s. This was a widespread hope among liberals at the end of the Reagan-Bush era. As Dennis Hopper put it in a deservedly forgotten 1990 movie, *Flashback*: "The '90s are going to make the '60s look like the '50s."

They were wrong, as even [Schlesinger conceded](#). Bill Clinton might have had big ambitions when he entered office, but the failure of HillaryCare and the success of the Contract with America put an end to that. Americans didn't want anything like a replay of the 1960s. As a result, Clinton spent most of his tenure clinging to the polls, terrified of straying too far from the political center, and the healthy tension between him and the Republican-controlled Congress led to welfare reform, tough anti-crime measures and a reduction of the deficit.

Some hoped that Al Gore would pick up the ball of idealism after Clinton dropped it. But the Florida recount settled that. In 2004, both Howard Dean, the front-runner, and John Kerry, the ultimate nominee, styled themselves as heirs to the now-overdue rebirth of Kennedy-era activism. They lost.

A turning tide in '08?

In 2008, liberals had more reason to hope. Obama ran the most unapologetically idealistic campaign in memory. Surely Americans were ready for some full-tilt-boogie government activism. Indeed, the polls said as much, with [large numbers of Americans supporting health care reform](#) and other liberal action items. Obama himself said that he saw himself as a Bizarro-world Reagan (or words to that effect), and he sought to usher in an left-wing version of the Reagan era three decades earlier. It was, he proclaimed, "an inflection point" in history. *Newsweek's* [Jonathan Alter](#) dutifully dusted off and updated Schlesinger's cycles theory a month before the election. You see, since the conservative era didn't begin until the tax revolts of 1978, so — *voilà!* — the liberal era should begin right now with Obama.

"Leftward ho!" Alter proclaimed.

A little more than a year later, we surely have been hoing leftward. But it already seems as if the American people are sick of it. The [2009 off-year elections](#) might not have been a repudiation of Obama, but they were definitely not an embrace of Obamaism. Meanwhile, by nearly 2 to 1, Americans say [the country is on the wrong track](#). Obama's [approval ratings](#) have slumped severely. Independent voters have abandoned the Democrats. The only populist fervor out there is fueling the anti-tax, pro-limited government, "Tea Party" movement, which is now more popular than either the GOP or the Democrats. Even last spring, when anti-Wall Street fervor was justifiably high, more Americans viewed "big government" as a bigger threat to the country than "big business."

Obama's signature domestic policy goal, health care reform, is [decidedly unpopular](#) with a majority of Americans. And a Rasmussen Reports poll last week finds that [70% of respondents](#) either support

waterboarding the Christmas bomber suspect or are unsure whether we should. Only 30% subscribe to Obama's position. And that's after an *unsuccessful* terrorist attack.

The many shapes of reform

Whatever you make of these facts, it seems fair to say they do not amount to kindling for a prairie fire of progressive activism, even if an improving economy lifts Obama's numbers.

One possibility is that Schlesinger was right, but not in a way he or his liberal peers would like. Perhaps we do move in cycles of reform every generation or so, but reform doesn't need to be synonymous with liberal do-goodery. Welfare reform was reform, too, even if the left hated it. And George W. Bush's "big government conservative" activism might have infuriated the left, but that doesn't mean normal Americans didn't see it as government activism all the same.

Or perhaps there are no laws of history, and Obama was simply wrong about being the chosen deliverer for a new progressive era. Perhaps, for all the liberal celebrating last year, the reality is that Obama fulfilled his mandate the moment he was sworn in as President Not-Bush, and it's hangovers for as far as the eye can see.

Forbes

The Limits Of Politics

by Joel Kotkin

Reversing the general course of history, economics or demography is never easy, despite even the most dogged efforts of the best-connected political operatives working today.

Since the 2006 elections--and even more so after 2008--blue-state politicians have enjoyed a monopoly of power unprecedented in recent history. Hardcore blue staters control virtually every major Congressional committee, as well as the House Speakership and the White House. Yet they still have proved incapable of reversing the demographic and economic decline in the nation's most "progressive" cities and states.

Obama and his congressional allies have worked overtime in favor of urban blue-state constituencies in everything from transportation funding and energy policies to the Wall Street bailouts and massive transfers of private wealth to powerful public-employee unions. Yet these areas continue suffering from net outmigration and stubbornly high job losses--as well as from some of the most severe fiscal imbalances in the nation.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the president's hometown of Chicago. The Windy City has suffered a very bad recession and may have fallen to its worst relative position since the Daley *reconquista* in 1989. As Chicago blogger [Steve Bartin](#) points out, even the presence of a Daley operative in the White House has failed to prevent the city from falling "in a funk." He writes that even a reliable booster, columnist Mary Schmich of the [Chicago Tribune](#), has lately described the city "as edgy, a little sullen and scared, verging on depressed."

There's plenty reason for feeling low, well beyond the humiliating loss of the Obama-backed Olympics bid last year. For example, Oprah Winfrey, the city's one *bona fide* A-list celebrity, is retiring her talk show in 2011. She is also reportedly [shifting much of her media empire](#) to Southern California, which, for all its admitted problems, has gads of celebrities and much better weather.

Chicago's most serious concern, however, revolves around the economy. In June, its [unemployment](#) rate peaked at 11.3%, far outpacing the national unemployment rate of 10%. Since 2007, the region has lost more jobs than Detroit, and more than twice as many as New York. Chicago's total loss over the entire

decade is greater than any region outside Detroit: about 250,000 positions, which is about the amount its emerging mid-American rival Houston has gained. In hard times businesses tend to look for places with a friendly environment for their enterprise. They avoid high taxes, political payoffs and inflated public employee salaries--all well-known Chicago specialties. These costs are undermining the city's competitive position in, for example, the [convention business](#), among others.

Other key sectors are also flailing. Political influence in Washington will not stem the flow of high-wage trading jobs away from the Mercantile Exchange to decentralized electronic exchanges. Nor can it reverse the [deteriorating state fiscal crisis](#) caused by weak economies and exacerbated by insanely high pensions and out of control spending policies. Late last month [Moody's](#) and [S&P](#) downgraded the debt ranking for the State of Illinois. Of course, such fiscal malaise is not limited to Chicago or Illinois. True blue California has an even worse debt rating. New York, another blue bastion, is also just about out of cash.

To be sure, the recession has not hurt New York as much as Chicago, but the [Big Apple has lost heavily](#), including 50,000 financial sector jobs since 2007. The outrageous bonuses to a few well-placed financial types will cushion but not deflect the influence of declining high-wage jobs. This can be seen in the striking weakness in the once seemingly unstoppable high-end condominium market. Particularly hard hit have been recent gentrified neighborhoods like [Williamsburg in Brooklyn, N.Y.](#), much like the hard-hit, newly developed areas along the Chicago lakefront.

Other blue bastions have been shedding jobs as well, both during the recession and over the whole decade. Beyond Chicago and Detroit, the biggest losses among the mega-regions have taken place in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles-Long Beach and Boston. Big money can still be made in Silicon Valley, Hollywood or around the academic economy of Boston, but in terms of overall jobs, the past decade has been dismal for these regions. Meanwhile, the consistent big gainers have been--besides Houston--Dallas and Washington, D.C., the one place money really does seem to grow on trees. Even Miami, Phoenix and San Bernardino-Riverside, in California, boast more jobs today than in 2000, despite significant setbacks in the recent recession.

These trends coincide with continuing shifts in demographics. The recession may have slowed the *pace* of net migration, but the essential pattern has remained in place. People continue to leave places like New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles for more affordable, economically viable regions like Houston, Dallas, Austin and San Antonio. Overall, the big winners in net migration have been predominately conservative states like Texas--with over 800,000 net new migrants--notes demographer [Wendell Cox](#). In what Cox calls "the decade of the South," 90% of all net migration went to southern states.

Utah, Colorado and the Pacific Northwest have also experienced positive flows--but perhaps most striking have been the migration gains, albeit modest, in Great Plains states such as Oklahoma and South Dakota as well as Appalachian Kentucky and West Virginia. Historically these places shipped many of their people to cities of the industrial Midwest, the eastern seaboard and California; that is no longer the case.

Ultimately these shifts could undermine the true blue political strategy, perhaps as early as the 2010 congressional and state elections, and certainly after reapportionment. By 2012, the census will likely take seats from New York, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio, handing them over to Texas, North Carolina, Georgia and Utah. Perhaps nothing will epitomize the new reality more than the fact that California, now among the most extreme blue states in terms of governance, will not gain a Congressional seat for the first time since the 1860s.

These trends suggest that the current administration and the majority party in Congress must adjust their strategy. Further attempts to push a radical "progressive" agenda--expansive public employee bailouts, higher taxes and radical measures to combat "climate change" and suburban development--might please their current core constituencies, but they have the perverse effect of driving even more people and jobs out of these regions.

All these underlying trends appear a boon to Republicans. But Democrats could counter the emerging GOP edge by appealing to the needs of these ascendant regions. By their very nature, growth states have the most urgent need for government investments in basic infrastructure, something traditional Democrats long have espoused. Moreover, such areas tend to become more tolerant as they welcome outsiders, and could be turned off to excessive Republican social conservatism.

For any of this to work, however, Democrats must first abandon their current narrow, urban-centric blue-state strategy. They must learn to adjust their appeal to regions on the upswing, or things could turn out very badly for them very soon.

The Corner

[Worst Quote of 2009](#) [Kathryn Jean Lopez]

This reader makes an excellent point:

I've seen a lot of "Worst Quote" features on other right-leaning sites, featuring howlers from the President, Pelosi, Evan Thomas, Chris Matthews, Andrea Mitchell, [Whoopi Goldberg](#).

All of them leave out what was to me the most chilling quote, uttered by one [Ruth Bader Ginsburg](#) in response to a New York Times Magazine question about lack of Medicaid funding for abortions: "Yes, the ruling about that surprised me. [Harris v. McRae—in 1980 the court upheld the Hyde Amendment, which forbids the use of Medicaid for abortions.] Frankly I had thought that at the time Roe was decided, there was concern about population growth and particularly growth in populations that we don't want to have too many of."

I'm surprised that quote didn't garner more attention, both in the year-end wrap up and during the debate about Healthcare Reform in the Senate.

Some quotes are just crazy, others truly, chillingly matter.

Drudge Report

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[Winter Could Be Worst in 25 Years for USA...](#)

[CHILL MAP...](#)

[Britain's big snow shuts cities...](#)

[GAS SUPPLIES RUNNING OUT IN UK...](#)

[Elderly burn books for warmth?](#)

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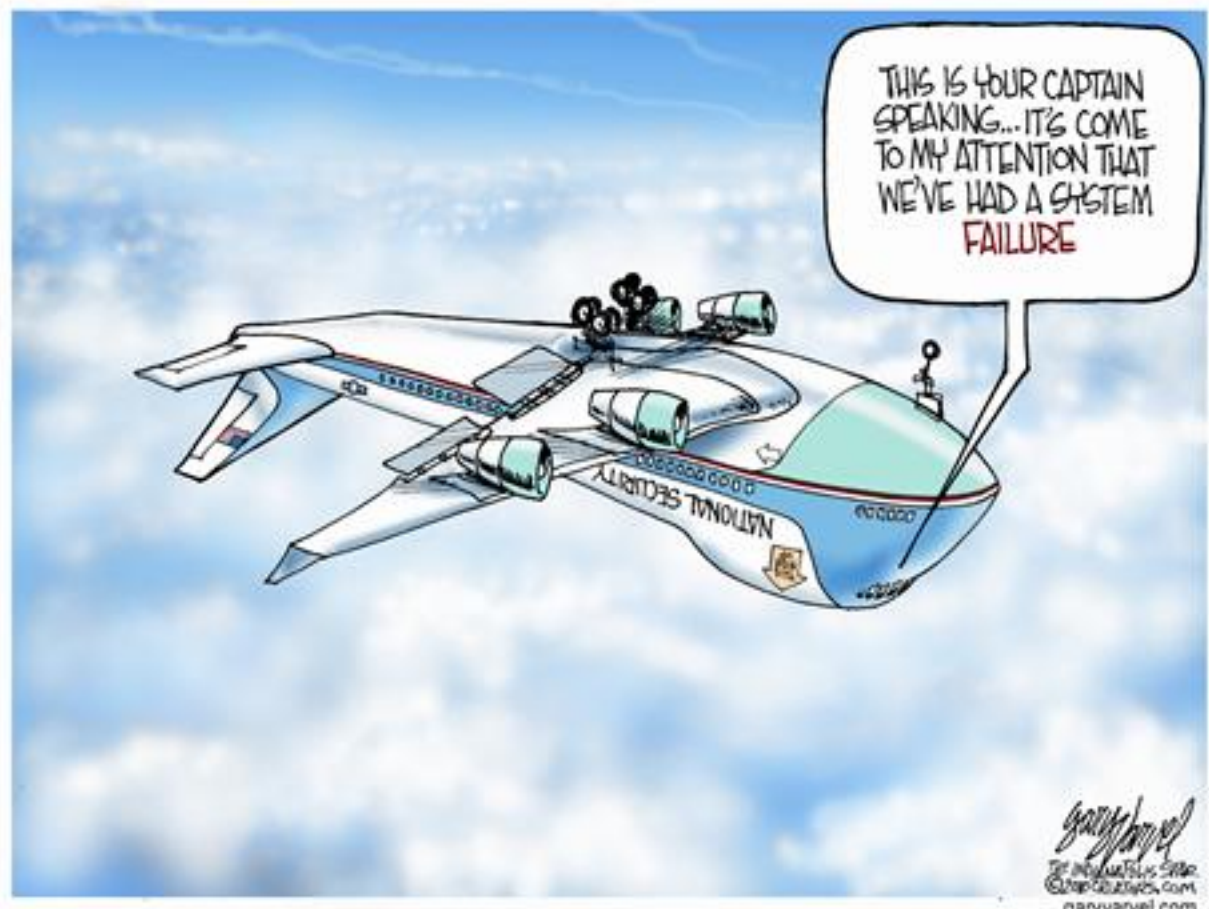
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THE SYSTEM WORKED.



THE SYSTEM WILL WORK.





FULL BODY SCAN OF AN AVERAGE PASSENGER.

FULL BODY SCAN OF NANCY PELOSI.

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