

# commentary

from our viewpoint...

## We've had enough of the anthrax scare!

Isn't it about time to end this silly anthrax scare? The entire country seems to be preoccupied by the latest revelations, frozen to the screen as moon-suited technicians race from one minutes concentration of spores to the next.

It isn't worthy of that much attention. The nation has better things to do.

And to say that isn't to trivialize the deaths of three people or the suffering of the handful of others who got sick.

But it is only four people. Dozens die every day in traffic accidents, and except for friends and relatives, no one says much.

If this is biological warfare, then it's a bust. Terrorists wielding razor blades and pocket knives were able to bring down the World Trade Center towers and pierce the Pentagon, killing more than 4,000 people inside a couple of hours.

As a nation, we were shaken, enraged, determined. There was no doubt, within a couple of days, who was responsible.

We were mad. The government swung into action.

The anthrax attack consists of a handful of letters mailed to media and government offices. The toll so far: four dead, maybe up to 30 infected in one way or another.

If this is the best high-tech terrorists can do, then we might as well get back to watching bomb clips on CNN.

But germ warfare is scary. The image of unseen death and crews walking around in sealed suits is frightening all right. Many of those who got sick, a couple who died had only the remotest contact with the tainted mail.

This produces fear, wasted energy, dysfunction and disunion. And that is precisely what the terrorists want: to frighten us, keep us from getting anything done.

So far, our travel industry is a shambles, our economy is tumbling into a recession and the nation is fixated on a disease which apparently can't be delivered in any coherent fashion.

It's not that the anthrax isn't deadly — enough of it dropped out in various places to kill a couple of people — but so far, it isn't a weapon of war.

As a nation, we need to put this in perspective and find something to watch on television besides the biosuits.

America isn't going to be defeated by hijacked airplanes or by a puny biological attack, but it could be defeated by losing focus on the war against the terrorists.

The terrorists have proven that they don't need much to wreck havoc. Now we have to prove that we are not only stronger, but more determined and more focused than our foes.

If that means putting anthrax on page 2 instead of page 1, of letting the nightly news focus on something more important but less scary, then let's do it. — *Steve Haynes*

### where to write

**U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 302 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

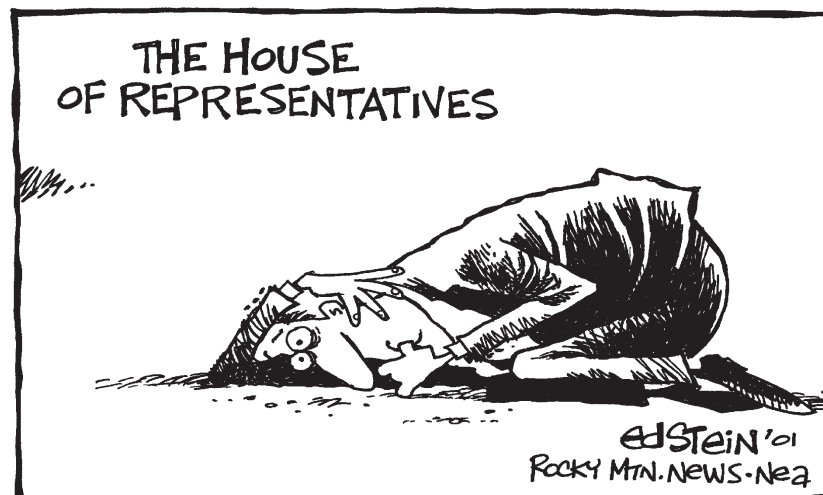
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## Reading for pleasure opens new adventures

I don't know about you, but I like to read. Usually I don't enjoy "real life" stories, especially about crooks or people who "get by" with something. Some people like getting the inside information about those types (O.J. Simpson and the death of Jon Bonet Ramsey come to mind), but I don't have any interest in that; they just make me sad.

Reading for me is primarily for pleasure. I get enough realism in my life; reading is better as a diversion. Oh yes, I do a lot of studying, but that is studying and definitely different from reading.

Libraries are wonderful places. I often go in and check out four or five books at a time. Sometimes I make very careful choices; other times, I just pull out books randomly. Of course, I sometimes get a book I've read before, but not often.

Recently, I did the "random selection" routine and came home with four authors I'd never read before. Not to be dissuaded, I took the one on the top of the pile and started in.

Now some books start out with a bang and keep you interested right from the first page. Others start slowly and get better.

My mother always taught me to finish anything



**lorna g. t.**

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I begin, but lately I've learned that's not always necessary. (Sorry, Mom.) Some books never get better and are just a waste of time.

The one on the top of the pile was like that. I was thirty pages into it when I realized I wasn't enjoying it. And I really had little hope of its getting better. So I began to look at the book more closely and discovered it was a book of short stories.

I don't usually like short stories; they're all introduction and seldom "develop." (At least in my opinion. Kind of like some of my columns!) So I made the choice to continue, but to just finish the first story.

My visual vocabulary is fairly extensive. I kind of understand a lot of words I would have difficulty defining. But this author was beyond me. I began to notice many words I had never seen before. Since the story was marginal at best, I went back to the

beginning and made a list of all the unfamiliar words.

Here is my list: piffle, arboreal, aleatory, seigneurial, coddling, atavistic, elliptic, maundering, anodyne, indiscipline, pollarded, catalpa, sibylline, architectonic, impasto, carpentered, subaqueous, teaselheads, monomania, eambency, pernickety (I think this is what my mother pronounced "persnickedy"), avuncular, abbatial, ocular, fundaments, fixidity, paroxysms, jejeune, gewgawish, crypto-husband and dekkko.

All of these unfamiliar words were within just 99 pages!

I didn't look them all up, I confess. Maybe if I had, I would have enjoyed the storyline, but I doubt it. The author wrote with variety, but was far from "reader-friendly."

One quote I did like and spent some time cogitating was: "How did one get silence into paint?" Think about it.

By now, I'm sure you are dying to read this same author, but I can't help you. I forgot the name almost as quickly as I forgot the story. But I'm feeling better now; my computer spell-check isn't recognizing all of the words either!

Contact Lorna at <lornagt@nwkans.com>.

## To fight terrorism, get a flu shot

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani of New York City has advised New Yorkers to do what high-level Bush administration officials should tell all Americans to do: get your flu shot. It is vital that as many people as possible get one, because when flu season hits, Americans could start clogging hospital emergency rooms, fearing that they are suffering from anthrax. Hospitals would have a terrible time handling the flu crush and could miss people with anthrax, who'd die if not treated. Getting a flu shot is one simple way ordinary Americans can fight terrorism.

One problem is that there's not enough vaccine to go around, but Sen. Bill Frist, R-Tenn., told me he's considering adding money to his bioterrorism bill to make sure 200 million doses are available.

Surgeon General David Satcher last week urged citizens to get flu shots, but the message needs to be delivered at a higher level, by Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, Homeland Security chief Tom Ridge or officials at the White House. And the message must be repeated.

Giuliani, with typical showmanship, delivered his message by rolling up his sleeve and getting his flu shot in public. It's something Thompson should consider doing, and members of Congress, too.

One knowledgeable HHS official, explaining that drug companies don't have an adequate amount of flu vaccine on hand, said HHS could push for more to be produced, much as it is doing with the antibiotic Cipro and vaccines for anthrax and smallpox.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's national immunization program estimates that, without a push, 79.6 million doses of



**morton kondracke**

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flu vaccine will be available this year, up from 70 million doses last year.

"Right now we recommend that people with health risks get flu shots, and we encourage others to do so," one HHS official said, "but we ought to recommend it for everyone to avoid confusion with anthrax."

The first symptoms of anthrax resemble flu: fever, sweating, loss of energy and muscle aches. But untreated inhalation anthrax quickly causes severe breathing problems, shock and death.

Even though only a few cases of inhalation anthrax have been diagnosed, causing three deaths, some emergency rooms in the Washington area have been jammed with people demanding Cipro.

Some patients have become irate when told by physicians that taking Cipro as a preventive measure is not advisable because it has side effects and can leave one vulnerable to germs that develop resistance to antibiotics.

The Washington hospital scene could be duplicated all across the country this winter if the population isn't inoculated against the flu.

Meanwhile, to deal with the real anthrax threat, the former top health official at the Pentagon, Dr. Sue Bailey, recommends that the Defense Department release anthrax vaccine to inoculate postal workers and others who may have been exposed to anthrax spores.

And another ex-official suggested that unused bandwidth on the electromagnetic spectrum currently assigned to the military but not being used could be converted into a link between federal homeland security officials and state and local health agencies.

According to Bailey, some postal workers are being given only a 10-day supply of Cipro, while others are getting a more effective 60-day supply, as are Congressional staffers who might have been exposed. Those getting only 10 days' worth of the drug would not be adequately protected if they inhaled anthrax spores. The anthrax would outlast the Cipro in their systems and they could die.

Those with 60-day treatments would be protected against anthrax immediately, she said, but might become vulnerable to a new anthrax attack at a later time. U.S. military personnel are put through a six-shot vaccination regimen, but Bailey said that exposed postal workers would be safe if they received a 30-day supply of Cipro and three doses of the vaccine over a four-week period. Now an NBC News consultant, Bailey recommends that if the postal system comes under sustained attack, the government should consider inoculating all postal workers.

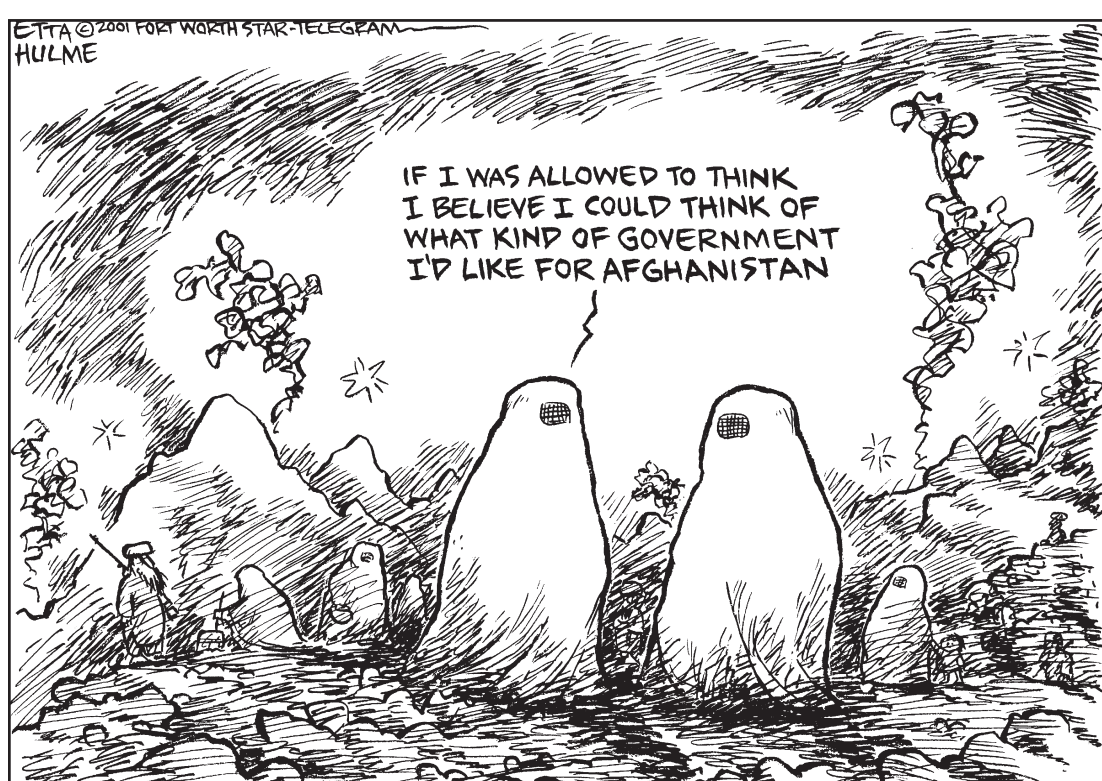
HHS officials said that not enough vaccine exists at the lone company producing it, the Bioprotect Corp. in Lansing, Mich., and that Bioprotect's supply has not been cleared by the Food and Drug Administration.

But Bailey, who oversaw military anthrax vaccinations during the Clinton administration, said she is confident that Bioprotect's vaccine is safe and effective, and called for its use with informed consent from patients.

Homeland security and bioterrorism obviously are new challenges for the government and the citizenry — ones that the Bush administration shouldn't be faulted for not having mastered in a few weeks.

But the administration should take suggestions from the outside, especially from Rudy Giuliani. In fact, when the mayor leaves office, President Bush should offer him a big job.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.



### Letter Policy

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