

commentary

from our viewpoint...

New crisis a way to attack freedoms

If you don't think we are losing our freedoms, consider the fact that if you are carrying any significant sum of cash, the police can just take it away from you and keep it.

Once they have it, you have to prove it's yours and you came by it in some legal way.

Good luck. Some people will say the only rights we've lost are the right to hide illegal profits and the right to transfer illegal drug money. But the loss goes far deeper than that.

Over the last few years, the government has moved in coordinated fashion to eliminate cash and increase both record-keeping and reporting requirements for banks and others who handle money.

It's been the law for many years now that cash transactions of \$10,000 or more must be reported. In the last couple of years, banks have been put under a rule called "Know Your Customer," which forces them to report any "unusual" transactions of lower amounts.

Of course, the feds want to be able to track drug money and organized crime profits, but you don't have to be a drug lord to be reported to the government. Maybe you just want to bury some of your stash in the back yard.

You might find yourself digging it up to show the FBI. Or the Internal Revenue Service, which has a vital interest in your affairs.

While tax collection isn't the reason used to push cash reporting laws, it's an unspoken side benefit. You can believe the IRS is watching those reports.

So is the freedom to evade taxes another "right" that's in danger? It goes way beyond that. Travel restrictions and record keeping now require people to present identification when they board an airplane or train. (Bus companies apparently are exempt, so far, despite the fact attacks on bus drivers are at least as frequent as attacks on trains or planes.) Border crossings are under even tighter restrictions.

Even your cell phone is building a database about not just who you call, but soon, where you made the call, down to the block.

By next year, we could all be faced with requirements to carry a national identification "smart card" with an imbedded computer which will record everything we do: Where we go, how you get there, what you do. Credit cards already track what we spend, whom we do business with, and soon they'll have "brains," too.

It's no joke. Security experts are pushing for the ID system now. And despite years of warnings and philosophical protest, Big Brother will be watching us more closely than ever.

One reason for this is simply that we can. Technology, our friend, is also our enemy. Technology makes modern life possible, but it also creates the means to track our every move. And it give terrorists and criminals power they never had before.

Are we better off for that?

You be the judge. — Steve Haynes

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Hope you had a safe and sane New Year's Eve

I don't know about you, but I had a sane and safe New Year's Eve celebration. I hope you did too.

However, it's difficult to believe that another year has started. Wasn't it just yesterday that the world was worried about the millennium being the end of life as we know it?

I didn't stockpile groceries or buy any one of the plethora (don't you love that word?) of books predicting doom and gloom.

Some of those authors should be hiding their faces; who would ever buy another one of their predictions?

Shades of Nostradamus.



Lorna G. T.

commentary

But back to New Year's Eve.

I celebrated with my church family. We played dominoes and silly games, ate delicious finger foods and then had a worship and commitment service that took us into the New Year.

We sang and rejoiced as we remembered the old year.

We prayed and thanked God for another year.

We hugged and wished each other well, and then right after midnight drove short distances to our respective homes for a good night's sleep. (And we had no hangovers the next day either.)

My New Year's celebration was not only safe and sane.

There is just something great about being with Christian friends - especially when you can't be with your family.

And there's also something very right about starting a new year in God's company. Never hurts to spend time with the BBIC (Big Boss in Charge)! Happy New Year!

Clinton's campaign continues

As they filed into the Harlem office building last week, riding the elevator to the 14th-floor headquarters of former President Bill Clinton, they must have looked like something out of a Hercule Poirot episode, or maybe even a Thin Man movie: the inevitable round-up of the usual suspects, coming together at the appointed time at the behest of Mr. Big — or, in this case, Mr. Big He.

There they were — not all, but many of the familiar faces and voices (some participated via telephone) of the Clinton years: Maggie Williams, then Hillary Clinton's chief of staff, and now Bill's; confidante Bruce Lindsay; former national security advisor Sandy Berger; former energy secretary Bill Richardson; former deputy White House counsel Cheryl Mills; former Chief of Staff John D. Podesta and more.

Had they come together to solve, once and for all, the Case of the Lost Legacy? Hardly. That is, this was no time for a post mortem. On the contrary, these once and future Clinton aides were gathered together not to move on, as they all used to say, but to dig in for a new kind of Clinton campaign — not for another office, but for another image.

As The New York Times put it, Clinton is "frustrated" that his reputation has been "battered" since leaving office, most recently with all the talk of his failure to protect Americans from both Osama bin Laden and the current recession. As a result, he has decided to mount a "well-organized and aggressive" effort to save, not the nation, of course, but something nearer and dearer — his face. Hence, the gathering of the Clinton clans (sans the wife and veep), which one anonymous participant described as a meeting of top lieutenants of a political campaign.



Diana West

commentary

And why not? Amid a war on global terrorism and a worldwide recession, what could possibly be of greater urgency than burnishing Bill Clinton's tarnished reputation? Far be it for this former prez to waste his office space simply writing a book, or his time building a habit. Accordingly, Clinton, who "dominated" the nearly two-hour strategy session, mobilized his faithful followers to 1) Compile a list of his achievements for supporters to keep "handy"; 2) Build a staff to coordinate the appearances of "Clinton surrogates" on TV talk shows; and 3) Plan to "raise Mr. Clinton's profile on the lecture circuit."

Before he gets started, Clinton might want to put the brain trust to work rebutting those pesky news stories coming out that document his personal inattention to terrorism while in office. Just last week, for example, former Clinton aide Dick Morris added to the pile with a revealing column about the "weekly strategy sessions at the White House throughout 1995 and 1996" at which the president was advised "to crack down on terrorism." Mr. Clinton "failed to act," Mr. Morris writes, "always finding a reason why some other concern was more important."

Reading the Times story, you get the feeling that Clinton is going to adopt a sort of better-late-than-never strategy on terrorism — and that in his mind

it's not even too late. That is, the former president doesn't seem to realize he's no longer in office. At this "campaign" meeting, Clinton expressed his concern "that Democratic leaders had not sufficiently spoken up for his administration," the newspaper reported. "Participants said that while some nice things were said about the Democratic leaders in Congress, Sen. Tom Daschle and Rep. Richard A. Gephardt, there was a view that they would do only so much to press the Clinton agenda."

The Clinton agenda — what Clinton agenda? Last time anyone checked the Oval Office, George W. Bush was behind the desk. Even so, as one participant told The New York Times, "The view was that House and Senate Democrats were too preoccupied with their own re-elections and their own deals."

This is truly bizarre. Naturally, the House and Senate Democrats are "too preoccupied" with their own "deals" to continue pressing the "Clinton agenda": The Clinton administration is over. Or is it? Clinton went on to express his desire to "play a central role in setting an issue agenda" for the Democratic Party, including its congressional and presidential candidates. (No reply as yet from Messrs. Gephardt and Daschle.)

My, what Napoleon complexities are contained within this here "post-presidency." Little wonder some participants declined to discuss the meeting publicly. Others even acknowledged the possibility that Clinton could "be portrayed as preoccupied with his reputation and not conducting himself appropriately for a former president."

Now why would anyone do a thing like that?

Diana West is a columnist and editorial writer for The Washington Times. She can be contacted via dwest@washingtontimes.com.

Thanks to the community for special gift

To the Editor:

The staff of Golden West Community Services and the individuals they serve would like to thank the Goodland Development Corp. and the generous members of the community for their Christmas donations.

The money we received was used toward the purchase of toiletry supplies for each individual. Special gift sacks containing items such as hand lotion, shampoo, cologne, toothpaste and deodorant were delivered to each person on Christmas Eve. Normally, the individuals are responsible for



from our readers

to the editor

purchasing these types of items out of their own very limited funds, so receiving them as gifts allowed them to have some extra money at Christmas time for other needs.

The generous Christmas spirit from this great

community personally touched the lives of 40 Goodland residents.

Meripat Bowman
Executive Director
Goodland

berry's world



"WE WANT AN EXACT REPLICA OF ME, PLUS WE'RE PREPARED TO PAY EXTRA FOR SOME SPECIAL OPTIONS LIKE BRAIN CELLS"



"OK! OK! I'LL TAKE THE TREE DOWN NOW."