

from our viewpoint...

Suicides brought protest not solutions

The suicides of three prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, brought howls of protest from prisoner-rights groups in the U.S. and around the world, but not one solid suggestion about what to do with the vicious terrorists held there.

Apparently, the U.S. is just supposed to release these people and let them go back to their deadly ways. Is that what we want to see?

President George Bush has proposed trying the terrorists before military tribunals, which presumably could find some innocent and sentence others to long terms. Where they would be held is anybody's guess.

Prisoners of war normally are held until the fighting ceases, but these prisoners do not fall into that category, at least not according to the administration. They are being held as "illegal enemy combatants" but are not accused of violating U.S. laws.

In most wars, of course, enemy soldiers are identified with the nation they serve. There is someone to represent them and to return them to when the war is over.

This war is different, and the U.S. has no model to follow on how to treat these prisoners. They fight for shadowy movements, not governments. They owe allegiance to ideals, not nations. In short, they do not fit neatly into the categories established in previous conflicts.

The war on terrorism may only have begun. The U.S. and our allies are fighting it on dozens of fronts around the world, with ground troops and intelligence agencies, aircraft and spies. No one knows the rules. No one knows when the war will be over. It has no declared beginning and likely will have no clear end.

So what do we do with the prisoners? Guantanamo Bay was a creative solution to an immediate problem. Taking the prisoners there avoided bringing them to U.S. soil or housing them with some ally.

Wherever they are held, there will be trouble. The prisoners showed last month they will cause trouble for their jailers at any time, in any way they can. Most are dedicated radicals sworn to fight the American devil.

Bringing them to the U.S. hardly seems desirable. No friendly nation would want them. We can't just release them and tell them to behave.

Mr. Bush's plan to try them seems reasonable, but it has been held up by legal action. The president has to wait for the Supreme Court to rule.

Meantime, the whole gang just brews trouble. You can't blame the prisoners for being unhappy, but you can blame them for being terrorists.

They belong behind bars. Most probably deserve worse. It would be nice to hear some reasonable suggestions about what, short of turning them loose, the U.S. should do with them. — *Steve Haynes*

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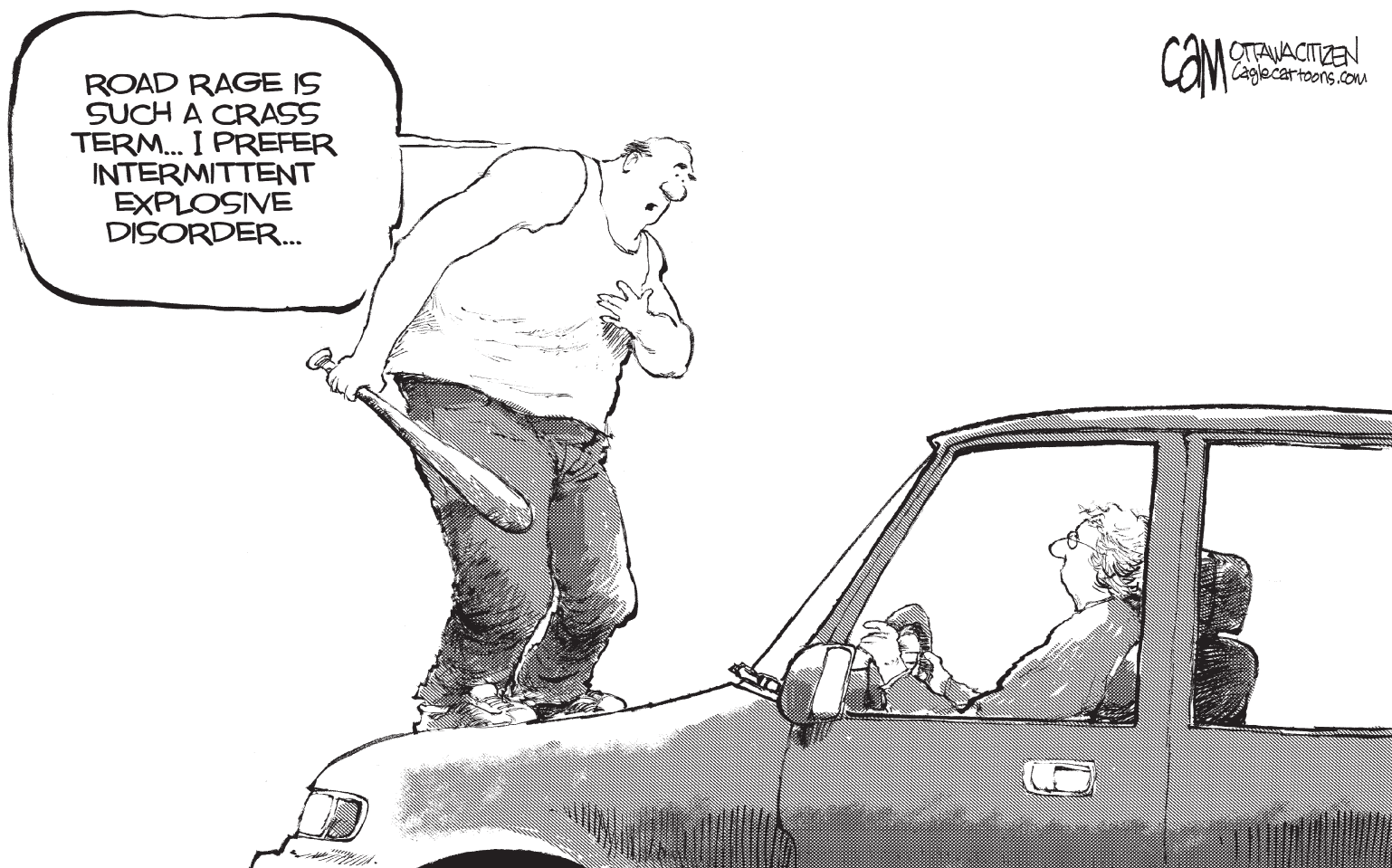
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I feel terrible about killing animals

I killed a snake yesterday, and I felt terrible about it.

I really didn't have a choice. Mr. Snake was slithering across my lane and a semi was headed for me in the other one. It was Mr. Snake or a head-on collision, and so a six-to-eight-foot rodent-remover got crushed under my wheels.

I didn't stop. I didn't go back to see if it was still alive or what kind of snake it was. I felt it as the car rolled over its long, slithery back. It was a goner.

It didn't make much difference whether it was a rattlesnake or a bull snake. Both are good pest removers, and since I wasn't planning to take it home as a pet, it should have had many more days to keep the rats and mice population at bay.

Only it didn't.

I know, I'm being overly sentimental about an animal many people will go out of their way to run over.

Most people don't like reptiles, amphibians, insects and other cold-blooded critters. But I do.



cynthia haynes

• open season

I had no problem with my son keeping lizards when he was in high school.

How could I? I kept a bull snake in my apartment when I was in college, and we had several garter snakes as pets when the children were younger and we lived in Colorado.

I'm also partial to turtles, frogs, toads and crayfish. I don't care for most insects and spiders, but I usually take a live-and-let-live attitude unless they're trying to live on my garden or in my house.

I'm the sort of person who stops along the road to pick up box turtles and move them out of the traffic. Sometimes I move them all the way home.

For the last several years, we've had a large toad living in the garden. This is a great sym-

biotic relationship. I give Mr. Toad a nice moist, green home and he helps me keep the insects away from my tomatoes.

My children have developed a love of animals, too.

Oldest daughter takes mice away from her cats and lets them go at the bottom of her garden.

Youngest daughter saves baby frogs, which are born in a fountain on her college campus. The tadpoles are born in the water but they can't get out of the fountain when they turn into frogs — and start to breath — and will drown unless rescued.

Son — well, he's the one who kept lizards in his room as a teenager. These days, he just keeps cats.

And then there's Steve. He puts up with the whole lot of us, catches crickets to feed the lizards, leaves the outside light on to attract bugs for the toad and brings the car to a screeching halt to rescue the odd snake or turtle. I'm not sure if he loves creepy crawlers, but he certainly does live with them.

All not quiet on the southern front

Waves of illegal immigrants are the least of Steve McCraw's problems. Texas has the longest border with Mexico, and McCraw, the state's director of homeland security, has the difficult job of trying to keep some very nasty criminals and potential terrorists from crossing it. Appointed by Gov. Rick Perry, McCraw, 52, is a former FBI intelligence expert who oversees state and local police resources that have been deployed to make Texas safer and help the U.S. Border Patrol. I talked to him by telephone from his offices in Austin:

Q: What is it you are supposed to be doing?

A: The focus, as the governor has laid out, is deterrence and prevention. This started in 2005 as part of a five-year strategic plan that identified that our most significant threat, the porous 1,240-mile Texas-Mexico border, didn't constitute just a national security threat but was a public safety threat as well. There has been an escalation over the years.

About a decade ago, the drug-trafficking organizations that pretty much dominated the cocaine and marijuana business have really evolved into extremely powerful and ruthless organized crime groups. The fact is, they control the northern Mexico border. The governor has argued that what's on the Texas border and the southwest border affects the rest of the nation. Mexican drug-traffic organizations now dominate the lucrative U.S. drug market, also the human smuggling market.

Q: So you're not concerned with illegal immigration?

A: First of all, what we are not dealing with is immigration policy. The position of the governor is that until we secure the border, immigration policy reforms, though very well-intentioned, will not be effective. It's been said that, well, if you are able to address the demand for immigrant labor, that you've in fact increased the security of the border. Well, you really haven't. If you decrease the demand for labor, criminals and terrorists will still come through an insecure border. They're not motivated by



bill steigerwald

• newsmakers

jobs. What the governor wants to focus on are terrorists and criminals. But in order to do that you really have to focus on securing the border between the ports of entry. Until you do so, there is no homeland security.

Keep in mind this has been an under-investment for decades. But what's different now than decades ago is 9/11. We all know al-Qaida has intentions of exploiting the southwest border as a way of entering resources undetected into the United States Middle Eastern countries have often used this as a corridor to get into the United States. You can't think of a place they haven't come from — the Philippines, Saudi Arabia. Four Iraqis were captured the other day by Mexican officials. Syria — who would think we are a pathway for Syria?

Q: Is it realistic to think that the Texas border can be closed and guarded?

A: You say "closed." We're not going to close legitimate commerce, OK. Nor do we care who comes through the ports of entry legitimately. It gives the U.S. government the opportunity to vet these people and use biometrics or whatever the case may be. But is it realistic? Certainly, you can accomplish anything if you have the will to do it. And certainly this nation can do anything it has the will to do.

Q: Does it make sense in your mind to do it?

A: The answer is yeah, of course. It's absolutely worth it. You can argue it from either way — from a public safety or national security threat. As long as you allow criminals and terrorists unfettered access to this country, you're at risk. We just can't afford not to know or be in a position not to deter or disrupt their ability to move seamlessly into our society. Keep in mind, these Mexican organized crime groups

are very good. They're very sophisticated. They couldn't be better financed. They employ former Mexican military commandos, former Guatemalan special forces, gangs — MS-13, Texas Syndicate, Texas Mafia — to do hits. They are extremely violent and as long as they have that pathway and control those points, there is a national security problem and a public safety problem.

Q: Is it a federal and state partnership?

A: It's a federal responsibility, OK. There's no question about it. (The feds are) responsible for protecting the sovereign border of the United States. But right now, they need help. It's going to take a while before they recruit, train and field additional Border Patrol. We're not going to see those resources for some time. Our men and women of the Border Patrol do a tremendous job and risk their lives night and day.

Q: If you could snap your fingers and get all the money you need to direct toward this problem, what would you do?

A: I'll tell you what the governor would do: invest in local and state law enforcement so they could be partners with the Border Patrol and increase our patrol presence at those high-threat areas between the ports of entry and increase the capacity in the near-border counties.

You want to make it inhospitable for these crime organizations. People will argue that they will still try other areas. They'll try the Canadian border. But you don't know what event or major operation you're doing today that has prevented operatives from getting into the country undetected. We have an aggressive defense. There's no offense here. The offense has to be done by the government of Mexico. Until the government of Mexico regains control of those areas by taking out or dismantling those organized crime groups, we have no offensive capability. But we can have an aggressive defensive capability — and we must.

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