

RiverOpinion



The Emperors Have No Clothes

Richard L. Hershatter
Contributing Columnist

*When Alice through the looking glass
Fell down the rabbit hole,
A frightened, insecure young lass,
She found the place quite droll.*

*Though fearful of what lay ahead
In scenes of mystery,
It seems she ended up instead
In Washington, D.C.*

If Hurricane Katrina taught us one convincing lesson, it is that even in the world's most powerful democracy, incompetence is endemic at all levels of government.

The beauty of our system of selecting leaders is that high office is open to all citizens, regardless of education or training.

The disadvantage of our system of selecting leaders is that high office is open to all citizens, regardless of education or training.

Unfortunately, however, the race is not always won by the best qualified candidate, but often on the basis of popular appeal.

Although forewarned by the National Weather Service, New Orleans Mayor Nagin temporized, equivocated and whined his way through the disaster and is still doing it, issuing daily proclamations worthy of a comic-strip character.

Governor Kathleen Blanco behaved like a deer caught in the headlights — at first paralyzed — and then responding to all suggestions as though they were trick questions, designed to embarrass her.

And who can forget the performance of Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff and FEMA Director Michael Brown — the Laurel and Hardy of national disaster lead-

ership? One can almost hear Chertoff complaining to Brown: "Look at the mess you got us into now, Stanley."

The entire experience could be treated as comic opera, were it not for the fact that the monumental incompetence displayed at every level resulted in the tragic loss of a thousand lives.

Well, Brown is now gone, and we all learn from our mistakes. Or do we?

The latest Alice-in-Wonderland announcement out of Washington, D.C. is that the federal government is contracting with a company owned by the government of the United Arab Emirates to take over and operate six major seaports in the United States:

New York, New Jersey, Baltimore, New Orleans, Miami and Philadelphia.

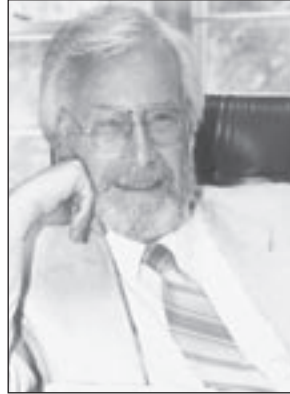
As my colleague and fellow columnist, Tom Burgum, is wont to say: "You couldn't make this stuff up."

Congress, of course, is in an uproar, demanding of Secretary Chertoff: "Look at the mess you're getting us into, Michael."

Chertoff's response, in essence: "But Ollie, these are **good** Arabs!"

"Good Arabs," indeed. If memory serves, it was good Arabs in the "friendly" Arab port of Yemen who not too long ago rammed a bomb-laden suicide craft into the side of the U.S.S. Cole, with the loss of many young American sailors.

Moreover, several of the hijackers who participated in the 9/11 attack on New York's twin towers had ties to the United Arab Emirates. Its territory has been utilized



by al-Qaida in the past, and most recently a renegade scientist used it to transfer nuclear components to terrorist nations.

In spite of what appears to be a loss of "institutional memory" on the part of our government, and notwithstanding the uproar being raised in the halls of Congress, one can hear the sound of rubber stamps being pounded on enabling documents all over the District of Columbia.

No less a personage than Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has called attention to the fact that the United Arab Emirates is an ally of the United States, and she sees no reason why the deal cannot go forward.

That country may indeed be an ally, but as the old adage goes: "Friends today, foes tomorrow." The Palestine Authority under President Abbas was working cooperatively with Washington under the Oslo accords up until several weeks ago, but one election, and look at them now.

In effect, our leaders are telling us not to worry. They have "secret" assurances that all will be well when the operation of our biggest seaports has been outsourced to an Arab country.

Is any reader of this column convinced? Are we willing to entrust so important a decision to the leaders who gave us the Katrina rescue and clean-up?

Or are some of you troubled by the thought processes displayed by key people in the Nation's capital?

It may well be that the emperors not only lack clothes, they lack common sense.

On the other hand, out-sourcing functions of government seems more and more the way to go.

Next thing you know, they'll be turning our war in Iraq over to Arab armies.

Oops!

Hershatter, Page 6

Manatee River News

7909 34th Ave. East
Bradenton, FL 34211
Phone: 941-749-0400
Fax: 941-749-0404

www.manateerivernews.com

Steve Reid, Editor and Publisher
sreid@manateerivernews.com

Christopher Berloni, Vice President/
Sales and Marketing
cberloni@manateerivernews.com

Advertising Executives
Nan Kirk • Linda Browning

Production Manager
Caron Cooper

Graphic Design
Jerry Maguire • Caron Cooper

Staff Writers
Melissa Donley • Lisa Hoover

Travel Editors
Rusty Chinnis • Christine Killeen

Contributing Writers
Dick Hershatter • Tom Burgum
Peter Holliday
Glenn & Carole Swope
Ric Russo

Newsroom
news@manateerivernews.com

Letters to the Editor
letters@manateerivernews.com

Advertising Department and Requests
ads@manateerivernews.com

To send Digital Artwork
ads@manateerivernews.com

To send Calendar Events
calendar@manateerivernews.com

They Are Actors — Not Heroes

Tom Burgum
Contributing Columnist

Courage and risk are the watchwords for this year's crop of nominees for "Best Picture," at least according to Paul Haggis, one of the nominees who was quoted in the Los Angeles Times as saying, "All the films this year took big risks. I think that's why we were really so proud to be nominated among these films that were really daring." Rachel Weisz, a supporting-actress nominee for "The Constant Gardener," opined, "All these films are very dramatic, very emotional but they happen to be about some really important contemporary political and social themes."

Mark Steyn in National Review quoted George Clooney, a triple nominee for directing, writing and acting, as attributing his own and other efforts to bravery. "We jumped in on our own," he said, discussing "Good Night, and Good Luck" with Entertainment Weekly. "And there was no reason to think it was going to get any easier. But people in Hollywood do seem to be getting more comfortable with making these sorts of movies now. People are becoming braver." The New Yorker became absolutely rhapsodic about "Good Night" calling it a "stirring examination of CBS News legend Edward R. Murrow's historic showdown with Sen. Joseph McCarthy, a passionate argument for a revitalized press, one that's willing to operate in pursuit of larger truths, and not just larger profits."

One thing becomes immediately obvious from the universally favorable press response to "Good Night, Good Luck" is reporters like movies about courageous reporters. Indeed, why wouldn't they? What is not so obvious is why Clooney is considered courageous for taking on Joe McCarthy and his anti-communist witch hunts. This is a battle fought, a victory won. There is no censor to blunt his efforts. There is no blacklist to which he may be assigned. He certainly is not in any physical danger or



does anyone seriously believe that he stands in danger of being assaulted on the streets of Los Angeles by some deranged octogenarian McCarthy fan? Joe McCarthy has few fans in this or any other country, at least in any number that may threaten box office receipts.

Clooney's mistake, such as it is, is simply confusing making a movie about a brave reporter with being a brave reporter. Clooney is not the first to confuse art with life. Even the sainted John Wayne fell prey to this mistake. Kirk Douglas told of Wayne calling him in 1956 and admonishing him not to take the role of Van Gogh in the film, "Lust for Life," as they were men of action. Douglas had to remind Wayne that they weren't Marine heroes or cavalry captains, they were only actors. Someone tell Clooney to check with Douglas.

None of this is to say, however, that "Good Night, Good Luck" is not a good, indeed a very good movie. Clooney is a very talented director and Edward R. Murrow is a deserving subject. Murrow is the most revered figure in American broadcasting. Even though Murrow is chiefly remembered today for his role in ending Joe McCarthy's reign of terror, he was initially famous for his Second World War radio coverage of the London Blitz. There still are Americans who remember his broadcasts from the streets of London even when the bombs were falling. Murrow and Fred Friendly later created a superb news division at CBS, one that has no equal then or now.

McCarthy is also a worthy subject. He first emerged from Senate obscurity in 1950 claiming he had the names of "known communists" who were in the employ of the State Department. It was the beginning of a personal witch hunt for communists in government and the entertainment industry that lasted for more than five years. McCarthy rarely provided any solid evidence to back up his claims. People were aware there had been some Soviet penetration of the government so his accusations found fertile ground and his often baseless charges ended many careers and damaged many people.

McCarthy was an unstable personality made worse by alcoholism and he used his position as Chairman of the Senate Investigations Subcommittee in the most reckless

Burgum, Page 6