

The Sky Is Not Falling

Ron Greene

Republican politicians, joined by some weak-brained Democratic colleagues, are going all out to convince us that we need to be quaking in fear of terrorists coming to kill us. They suggest that if we don't give up our basic rights to privacy, and spend another trillion dollars on defense, there is no hope for our country.

If you believe this, I suggest that you get a grip on reality. The sky is not falling. The number of deaths from terrorism in the U.S. through the years is minuscule by comparison to deaths from any of many other sources: Deaths from heart disease, from stroke, from automobile accidents, from breast cancer, from prostate cancer, from other cancers, from diabetes, from influenza, from suicide, from accidental falls, from accidental poisonings, from gun violence, from accidental drowning *are each* far higher every year than those from terrorist activities. Even during 2001, when U.S. deaths from terrorism sharply peaked, deaths from each of those causes just mentioned (except for drowning) were all considerably greater than the number of deaths due to terrorism. For most years deaths from terrorism have been very small fractions of a per cent of those from more routine causes.

I am not saying that we should ignore terrorism. What I am saying is that our government is already doing a good job of protecting the people of this country, and that we should not let fear paralyze us or reduce our fundamental rights or lessen our fundamental humanity. The people of France and the United Kingdom, among other nations, have gone through earlier periods of violence by bombings and other terrorist activities with courage and without panic. Are we any less courageous than they?

If we do want to expend more resources to reduce deaths and injuries from violence, it would be much more effective for us to work to reduce (e.g.) our domestic gun violence. But that, of course, doesn't make for good political haranguing or sensational media coverage. So we'll probably continue to allow ourselves to be used and abused by political and media windbags.