

Sentinel Editorial

Being prepared

Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst is a useful, if underutilized, philosophy for dealing with economic unknowns, be they personal finances or large-scale economics.

For decades, this region has readily accepted the huge economic upside of having a nuclear power plant in our backyard. Even when it was clear the plant was aging, evacuation plans were terrifyingly inadequate and, post 9/11, the plant posed a large and inviting target for terrorists, we continued to savor the high-paying jobs, the public relations-driven corporate largesse and the more-affordable utility bills that Vermont Yankee made possible.

No more.

The power is gone, the charitable donations have dried up and the jobs are leaving in batches, now that the plant has shut down for good. For many, the trade-off is well worth it. For others, the loss of jobs, taxes and donations outweighs all.

Individually, the counties closest to the plant and in which the majority of Entergy Nuclear’s local employees have lived — Cheshire County, Windham County in Vermont and Franklin County in Massachusetts — have witnessed economic loss before. Each has, at some point, relied on large manufacturers who have since relocated, shut down or cut back operations. And each has survived.

But the closure, and eventual disappearance, of Vermont Yankee stands to eventually cost Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts nearly \$500 million. Annually.

That includes the power the company sold, its corporate donations and taxes, and the 1,200 jobs that averaged more than \$100,000 in salary. An economic impact study by the UMass Donahue Institute put the loss of local income at \$100 million a year, starting in 2021, when the first stage of the plant’s decommissioning is completed.

Yes, the impact of Vermont Yankee’s closure will truly be regional, and dealing with it really requires a regional approach.

Fortunately, the Southwest Regional Planning Commission agrees. The agency covers 35 communities in southwestern New Hampshire, offering local and regional planning services and conducting studies of issues affecting the region.

Recognizing that the shutdown of Vermont Yankee is a major socio-economic event for all three counties, not just in New Hampshire, the commission contacted similar agencies in Vermont and Massachusetts to pull together information on the issue. That can be found at www.swrpc.org/vermontyankee.

“We can stand back and hope that some new economic engine will chug into the region and make up the difference, or we can help get folks talking about strategic steps to encourage new economic activity,” said Tim Murphy, executive director of the commission.

That makes sense to us. Perhaps in this case, the philosophy should be hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and take what action you can.

Plot a sobering reminder

By NEWSDAY

There are people in New York City who want to frighten, attack, maim and kill. If our concerns about that are often vague, they were given names and faces Thursday.

Two Queens women — both U.S. citizens — were charged with planning to build a bomb they hoped to detonate at an event big enough to make headlines around the world.

Reportedly calling themselves “citizens of the Islamic State,” they allegedly plotted about the best places to unleash their homemade hell — rejecting Herald Square as filled with just “normal people” and instead debating the relative merits of a high-profile event like Boston’s marathon versus the packed funeral of an NYPD officer slain in the line of duty.

According to the FBI’s complaint, Noelle Velentzas, 28, and Asia Siddiqui, 31, purchased propane tanks, fertilizer and potassium gluconate — all useful for large explosions. They allegedly acquired the ingredients not via weapons

dealers, but in the local hardware store and the neighborhood pharmacy, in the aisles where many of us shop.

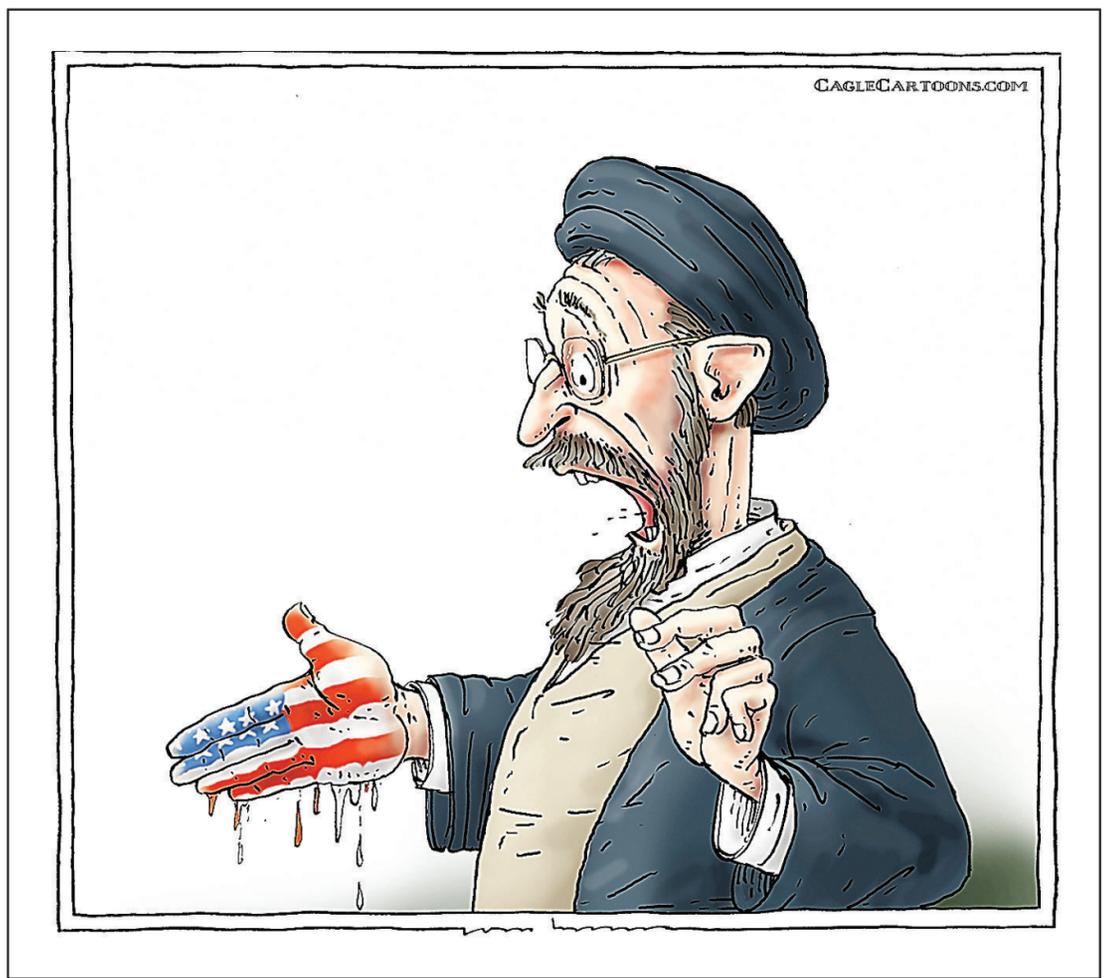
Investigations into possible terrorist plots in NYC — even arrests — now happen fairly often. Those who have been charged seem to range from deadly serious and on the verge of acting on their plans to some who are utterly incompetent and vague about goals.

But these women seem to fall in the middle of that spectrum, as “aspirational” but “closer to operational,” a law enforcement source told amNewYork. This plot is unusually unsettling. These are young women, former roommates living in NYC’s most diverse borough, who were free to enjoy the goodness this nation offers. Yet, they were obsessed with killing its people.

“She’s always been a nice lady, appeared to be a good mother,” a neighbor said of Velentzas, who walked her daughter to and from school every day. “She didn’t appear to be political.”

The charges ... should make us worry. We can’t be consumed with fear, but must not forget the threat.

TREATS ARE OUT THERE, EVEN IN PLACES WE WOULDN’T EXPECT.



Christianity created the modern world

By RICH LOWRY

Perhaps the most important event in Western history occurred on the road to Damascus, when Saul of Tarsus fell to the ground and converted from a persecutor of Christians to a believer himself.

His writings as the Apostle Paul make him arguably, as Larry Siedentop writes in his new intellectual history “Inventing the Individual,” the greatest revolutionary the world has ever known. Paul upset the assumptions of the ancient world and created the moral basis for modernity as we know it.

In his revelatory book, Siedentop explains how Christianity undergirded the development of Western liberalism, albeit slowly, with many detours, and sometimes inadvertently. It cleared the space for individual rights and ultimately for secularism itself, such that nearly everyone today — left and right, believers and militant atheists — stands on ground created by Christian moral premises.

Rather than the story of Christianity being a tale of unrelieved darkness and repression, as the hostile version has it, running straight from the Crusades and Inquisition to the

contemporary low point of Indiana’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act, it created a world uniquely suited to human dignity and flourishing.

Siedentop begins his story with the ancients. The Greeks and Romans of pre-history weren’t secular; the family was a religious cult run by the paterfamilias and suffused with ritual and assumptions of social inequality. Even if you are pro-family, you can agree that ancestor worship ... takes it a little far.

The key distinction at this time, Siedentop points out, wasn’t between public and private spheres, but between public and domestic spheres, the latter characterized by the family with its rigidly defined hierarchical roles. There was no room for the individual with his or her own rights.

“The most distinctive thing about Greek and Roman antiquity,” Siedentop writes, “is what might be called ‘moral enclosure,’ in which the limits of personal identity were established by the limits of physical association and inherited, unequal social roles.” Christianity set in motion

something completely different. It emphasized the moral equality of all people, and it made individual conscience a central concern.

“For Paul,” Siedentop writes, “the love of God revealed in the Christ imposes opportunities and obligations on the individual as such, that is, on conscience.” The source of authority had been reversed: “Increasingly it was to be found ‘below,’ in human agency and conscience, rather than ‘above’ in coercive eternal ideas.”

This was a radical development that contained the seeds of the liberties we enjoy today. The story of the West is, in part, the often-serpentine working out of these new intellectual currents. That story includes, among other things, monasticism, the split between temporal and spiritual power, and the canon lawyers who began to set out a system of law that honored the rights of the individual.

Rather than the Middle Ages being the time of stagnation of popular imagination, they were a period of important intellectual ferment. Enforced belief,

Siedentop writes, became a contradiction in terms, and eventually the intuitions of Christianity were turned against the institutional church itself, meaning that “secularism is Christianity’s gift to the world.”

This is often obscured because Renaissance humanism looked back favorably to antiquity, and secular authorities had to assert themselves to suppress the violence of the wars of religion of the 16th century. Both trends, according to Siedentop, “suggested that the emergent secularism or proto-liberalism had little to do with the moral intuitions generated by Christianity, but rather that their inspiration should be located in antiquity and paganism.” (It didn’t help that Europe long had a church that was associated with aristocracy and hierarchy.)

Some Muslim writers, Siedentop points out, refer to “Christian secularism,” which isn’t quite the outlandish oxymoron it sounds. “Strikingly,” he writes, “in its first centuries Christianity spread by persuasion, not by force of arms — in contrast to the early spread of Islam.”

Therein lies a tale, one upon which our world depends.

Rich Lowry writes for King Features Syndicate.

IT MADE INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE AND MORALITY A CENTRAL CONCERN.

Congress can fix regulatory overlap and inconsistencies

By CARY COGLIANESE

As if federal budget negotiations weren’t messy enough, President Barack Obama is hoping to use the process simultaneously to untangle regulatory knots, starting with food safety.

His 2016 budget proposal lays out how a dozen or so agencies, enforcing more than 30 laws, share responsibility for the safety of our food supply. For example, regulation of frozen cheese pizzas rests with the Food and Drug Administration, while the U.S. Department of Agriculture assumes oversight when pizzas have pepperoni on them. Don’t even ask about anchovies. The president’s budget would put the USDA’s and FDA’s food-safety functions under one roof.

If Obama succeeds, it would be a partial victory against long-lamented overlapping and redundant federal regulations. But even this seemingly logical consolidation faces long odds. Agency reorganizations raise pitched turf battles in Washington, not only between parts of the executive branch but also in Congress, where reorganization necessarily forces some subcommittee chairs to give up their agency oversight authority.

Congress and the president have a much more politically feasible option: pass a law giving federal agencies authority to harmonize their rules and regulatory activities.

In recent decades, big regulatory reorganizations have come about only in the wake of major crises: the creation of the Department of Homeland Security after 9/11, the overhaul of the Minerals Management Service after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the creation of the Financial Stability Oversight Council after the financial meltdown. Surely it would be better for everyone if government could improve its coordination without waiting for a disaster to strike.

As a model, Congress could look to international trade practices. To ease the flow of goods between countries that have different rules for the same goals (such as product safety), trade partners agree that compliance with one country’s standards will satisfy the other country’s as well. It’s called a “mutual recognition agreement.”

Congress could pass a domestic version of that same idea, a “harmonization

statute.” Such a law would let federal agencies work out their areas of regulatory overlap on their own. They’d have to run any agreements through notice-and-comment rule-making.

After that step, compliance with one agency’s rules could satisfy the similar demands from the other agency.

A harmonization law is not as politically sexy as a massive overhaul of big bureaucracies, but it would give agencies authority to rationalize their oversight on a case-by-case basis.

It’s grounded in precedent, too. In civil disputes with overlapping jurisdictions, judges apply well-established “conflict of laws” principles to determine which law predominates. Congress likewise took a harmonization approach in 1996 when it told regulators to consider adopting existing voluntary standards, such as those created by industry or private groups, before writing entirely new regulations.

Relying on existing regulations means the government can use its limited resources more wisely while lessening the burdens of compliance for businesses and other

regulated organizations.

Occasionally agencies have, on their own, chosen to defer to the existence of other regulatory schemes. The Environmental Protection Agency, for example, determined a few years ago that it did not need to inspect dairy operations for leaky milk tanks because the USDA and state public health agencies were already doing that.

With hundreds of federal agencies creating thousands of new rules every year, plenty of additional harmonization opportunities surely exist. Government regulators, however, do not always have incentives to rely on other agencies’ regulatory actions. Nor do they necessarily have the legal authority to do so.

Those who want a more rational system of regulation can continue to work toward large organizational change, like that proposed by Obama. But a more achievable strategy would be for Congress to pass simple legislation giving regulatory agencies clear authority to smooth out their overlaps and inconsistencies one rule at a time.

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