



*THE BLOG*

# “It Keeps the Elephants Away”

By Marty Kaplan

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Sometime in the next few years, there is going to be a major terrorist attack on American soil, and it will inflict incalculable human and economic damage.

Sometime in the next several years, a fatal virus will sweep the world, causing the most catastrophic medical disaster to hit America since the great influenza pandemic.

Sometime in the coming years, an environmental calamity far worse than Katrina will devastate a region of the United States.

Sometime in the years ahead, an international panic will cause foreign governments and investors to lose confidence in US markets and credit, and it will trigger an economic disaster more wrenching than anything experienced in this country since the Great Depression.

No, I don't have a crystal ball. But these mini-doomsday scenarios are not only possible, but plausible.

Right now there is only one thing propping up the Bush administration and Republican control of Washington: fear.

It is playing out in two arenas.

One is the culture war, where fear of moral contagion — the idea that gays, evolutionists, abortionists, Kevorkians et al are out to undermine your moral authority — has caused people to identify with Republicans culturally, even though that affiliation is completely at odds with their own economic self-interest and the American ideal of pluralism.

The other political place that fear rules is national security. The best case that Rove's puppets can make is that nothing as bad as 9/11 has happened since 9/11.

But the notion that we have been spared because of Republican policies currently in place is a joke. We have been spared because we have been lucky.

The civil war we started in Iraq has created an Al Qaeda breeding ground, not only there, but around the globe; meanwhile, our ports and borders remain pathetically compromised, and our military is stretched to the breaking point.

The response to Katrina was not an anomaly; does anyone think that FEMA and Homeland Security are now up to the task?

Is it believable that our current national stewards, so deeply antipathetic to government, are capable of adequately mobilizing public and private resources to effectively combat a pathogenic outbreak?

Does it make sense that the same people who politicize science, muzzle scientists and empower the private sector to run environmental and energy policy — it is credible that what they're doing right now is an adequate defense against future disasters?

Is there any way to look at our record trade deficit, record budget deficit, record indebtedness to foreign nations, record dependence on foreign oil, coupled with a fundamentalist tax-cutting religion, and think that our economy is not one sneeze away from a nightmare?

When Democrats point out how ill-prepared the country is for the future, Republicans haul out the argument that Democrats are the party of "doom and gloom," and that Republicans are the party of optimism.

It reminds me of that old joke: Guy walks into a bar. Orders a drink. Bartender sees the guy keep snapping his fingers. Asks the guy, "Why're you snapping your fingers?" Guy says, "It keeps the elephants away." Bartender says, "But there aren't any elephants." Guy: "See? It works."

Unfortunately, there *are* elephants; even more unfortunately, the Republican platform is finger-snapping.

Snap! Democrats are al Qaeda coddlers. Be afraid! Snap! Democrats want to raise your taxes. Be afraid! Snap! Democrats want to take away your SUVs. Be afraid! Snap! Homos are recruiting your kids. Be afraid!

See? It works.

It is tragically possible that we will look back at the period between 9/11 and some future cataclysm as a time of innocence, a shocking era of neglect that the World Trade Center infamy was supposed to awaken us from.

There is only one thing we have to fear - and that is fear of fear itself.

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