

TRUE “RESILIENCE” WOULD HELP PREVENT THE NEXT 3,420 CLIMATE-RELATED DEATHS, TOO

This article—showing how many stupid projects have been funded in the name of homeland security in the last decade—has been making the rounds. Everyone has been pointing to its details on how few people have died in terrorist attacks.

“The number of people worldwide who are killed by Muslim-type terrorists, Al Qaeda wannabes, is maybe a few hundred outside of war zones. It’s basically the same number of people who die drowning in the bathtub each year,” said John Mueller, an Ohio State University professor who has written extensively about the balance between threat and expenditures in fighting terrorism.

“So if your chance of being killed by a terrorist in the United States is 1 in 3.5 million, the question is, how much do you want to spend to get that down to 1 in 4.5 million?” he said.

[snip]

Only 14 Americans have died in about three dozen instances of Islamic extremist terrorist plots targeted at the U.S. outside war zones since 2001 – most of them involving one or two home-grown plotters.

Returning to the National Climatic Data Center data I was looking at the other day, 3,420 people have died since 9/11 in big weather disasters:

2002: 28
2003:131
2004: 168

2005: 2,002
2006: 95
2007: 22
2008: 296
2009: 26
2010: 46
2011 634 (counting 40 thus far in Irene)
Total: 3,420

Now I raise this not just to make the obvious point that we would be better off dumping some of this money into dealing with climate change, but also to make a point about the theme Obama is pushing for this year's commemoration of 9/11: resilience.

The White House has issued detailed guidelines to government officials on how to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, with instructions to honor the memory of those who died on American soil but also to recall that Al Qaeda and other extremist groups have since carried out attacks elsewhere in the world, from Mumbai to Manila.

The White House in recent days has quietly disseminated two sets of documents. One is framed for overseas allies and their citizens and was sent to American embassies and consulates around the globe. The other includes themes for Americans here and underscores the importance of national service and what the government has done to prevent another major attack in the United States.

[snip]

One significant new theme is in both sets of documents: Government officials are to warn that Americans must be prepared for another attack – and must, in response, be resilient in recovering from the loss.

“Resilience takes many forms, including the dedication and courage to move forward,” according to the guidelines for foreign audiences. “While we must never forget those

who we lost, we must do more than simply remember them –we must sustain our resilience and remain united to prevent new attacks and new victims.”

[snip]

Resilience is a repeated theme of the communications. “We celebrate the resilience of communities across the globe,” the foreign guidelines state.

I applaud the appeal to “resilience” in the scope of terrorism. True resilience would do far more in the event of an attack than the Zodiac dive boat, cattle nose leads and electric prods, and \$750,000 terrorism fences described by the LAT.

But it’s not clear the deficit cutting obsessed Administration is talking about resilience. It’s not talking about maintaining existing bridges and building redundant ones close to key trucking routes; it’s not addressing our decrepit drinking and waste water infrastructure; it’s not done anything to fix the 1,819 high hazard potential dams in this country; it’s not addressing even the shoddy electrical grid supplying the nation’s capital.

Granted, Obama is pushing a highway bill, though early reports say it’ll be a mere fraction of the 2.2 trillion needed to shore up our nation’s infrastructure.

Not only would investing in our country’s infrastructure make us truly resilient in the event of another attack (and create jobs), but it would also help localities better withstand—or at least recover from—many (though not all) severe weather events, which will likely become more frequent in the next decade.

Given that more people have died from severe weather in this country over the last decade than terrorism (even including 9/11), we really ought to be dumping the money we have been investing in fancy dive boats in climate change instead. But barring that, we at least ought to

be doing the kinds of things that will make us more resilient—to both terrorist attacks and climate disasters.