A Matter of Perspective

Description

As the toll of US troops lost in the GWoT nears 3800, the AP is counting down the next few deaths.

For a moment, extract yourself from the steely eyed glare at that one metric and consider this:

> Traffic deaths should top news
> By Peter J. Woolley â€“ Special to The Washington Post
> Thursday, December 28, 2006
> The nonstory of 2006 was also the nonstory of 2005. It is a nonstory every year going back decades. Yet the number of people who die in car crashes in the United States is staggering, even if it is absent from the agenda of most public officials and largely ignored by the public.
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> When all is said and done and the ball begins to drop on New YearÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s Eve, 44,000 people, give or take several hundred, will have died in auto accidents this year. To put that number in perspective, consider that:
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> Ã¢â‚¬Â¢ At the 2006 casualty rate of 800 soldiers per year, the United States would have to be in Iraq for more than 50 years to equal just one year of automobile deaths back home.
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> Ã¢â‚¬Â¢ In any five-year period, the total number of traffic deaths in the United States equals or exceeds the number of people who died in the horrific South Asian tsunami in December 2004. U.S. traffic deaths amount to the equivalent of two tsunamis every 10 years.
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> Ã¢â‚¬Â¢ According to the National Safety Council, your chance of dying in an automobile crash is one in 84 over your lifetime. But your chances of winning the Mega Millions lottery are just one in 175 million.
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> Ã¢â‚¬Â¢ If you laid out side by side 8-by-10 photos of all those killed in crashes this year, the pictures would stretch more than five miles.
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> Ã¢â‚¬Â¢ If you made a yearbook containing the photos of those killed this year, putting 12 photos on each page, it would have 3,500 pages. If you wanted to limit your traffic-death yearbook to a manageable 400 pages, youÃ¢â‚¬â„¢d either have to squeeze more than 100 photos onto each page or issue an eight-volume set.
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> Can you hear me now? Automobile deaths are the leading cause of death for children, for teen-agers and in fact for all people from age 3 to 33. Yet this annual tragedy is not a cause celebre.

Opinion leaders largely ignore the ubiquitous massacre. No marches, walkathons, commemorative stamps or fund-raising drives are organized. It is not brought up in the State of the Union address. It is rarely the subject of public affairs shows. Statistics arenÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t updated daily in major newspapers or broadcasts.

Gruesome crashes are reported just one at a time, each as if it might never happen again. Little attention is paid to the aftermath: safety measures taken or not taken, the workings or non-workings of the justice system. These avoidable deaths, as well as more than 2 million nonfatal dismemberments, disfigurements and other injuries that go along with them, have become part of the fabric of everyday life in the United States.

Elected officeholders naturally take the path of least resistance. They are well aware that significantly reducing deaths on the roads requires radical solutions in the form of regulation, investment and enforcement. Roads need to be made safer, for example, by extending guardrails and medians to every mile of busy highways. Speeding and aggressive driving need to be much more rigorously controlled. Trucks need to be separated from automobiles wherever possible. And cars need to be built slower and stronger.

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But every solution is readily opposed by someone: manufacturers, industrial unions, truckers, consumers, taxpayers Ã¢â‚¬â€• though all are potential victims themselves. The public is not to blame. It is hemmed in on every side by mind-numbing advertising and shouted stories of the moment. Apparently no medium is willing to bludgeon people Ã¢â‚¬â€• as they need to be Ã¢â‚¬â€• with statistics and trends on the dangers facing them every time they set out in their automobiles.

Only if there is a public outcry will this situation get the attention due it. Only when people fully realize the absurd and avoidable costs of the dangers that stalk them on the road Ã¢â‚¬â€• and then demand governmental action in the form of forceful intervention and strict regulation Ã¢â‚¬â€• will this become the story of the year, as it should be.

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Kinda puts some things into perspective, donâ€™t you think?

Tracked back @:Ã, SteelJaw Scribe

Category

1. Stream of Consciousness
2. Supporting the Troops

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