

Odd though it may seem, there's a certain symmetry in the juxtaposition of the attempt at a new approach to Iraq with the arrival of that most American of holidays, Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving puts a gratitude pop up on all screens, but it is more. While the Fourth of July celebrates the formal arrangements of nationhood, Thanksgiving is a mirror capable of reflecting deeply held attitudes.

The story is simple. Religious people leave their homeland because they are convinced their way of understanding God and the world is superior to all others.

They sit down to a meal provided in part by aboriginals to whom they likewise consider themselves superior.

And Iraq? We have succeeded in freeing Iraq from dictatorship.

Our problem is what to do with what Iraqis are doing with this freedom.

The American notion was that they would use it to build a government of representative democracy and feed themselves by means of a market economy.

Iraqis seem to want to use their



Musings

By Robert Morton-Ranney

freedom to kill each other.

Sen. John McCain is reported as suggesting we need either to increase troop strength significantly or get out before more Americans die.

In other words — or so it would seem — force our use of freedom on Iraqi society, or let them use it any way they want.

Trouble is, we don't like this choice.

We want the Iraqis, on their own, to choose our kind of life. We want them to be free to choose freely to free themselves of their mutual distrust, and even hatred, and to replace freely roving bands of thugs with freely competing hives of merchants.

We want them to replace shooting wars with price wars. We want them to put the pursuit of economic power in place of the pursuit of militia power.

And we want them to do so because they decide to. Freely.

The Pilgrims and those who followed them here were much more hard core. Convert the natives, or drive them off, or kill them.

Our way is better. Deal with it.

Early 21st-century Americans are truly between a rock and a hard place. We prize freedom and, sociological realities aside, attempt actually to practice it in many ways.

What we share with the Pilgrims is the attitude that our way — or, at least, or idealized vision of our way — really is the best method for allowing great gaggles of people to interact contentedly.

But we differ in our awareness of the requirements for supporting such an arrangement.

Such has been the case for many groups.

An article by Warren Goldstein in the recent issue of Yale Alumni Magazine explores the current plight of mainline Protestantism. Membership in mainline Protestant churches reached a peak about 1965 and, in the following twenty-five years, dwindled by almost a third.

Goldstein's theme is that throughout this time most of these churches—as he puts it, “the people who put the P in WASP”—ignored the nitty-gritty of organizational life. They didn't attend to the specific details of why people seek out groups, what makes them excited about being there, and why they stay.

These are realities that go beyond and in many cases overtake in significance the flavor of fulminations from the leadership, and organizations ignore them at their

own peril.

All organizations, of any type. Including whole nations.

Personally, I think liberty's a terrific idea. But ideas seldom sell themselves, especially when we're talking about very large groups of people.

The Pilgrims and those who came after them did a lot of things that have since come to be judged harshly, and for good reason.

What gives pause is the reality that, think what we might of them, they were willing to do anything they could to bring their vision into being.

We might be inclined the let mainline Protestants off the hook by recalling that religious traditions (of all stripes) are pregnant with stories of people who were

satisfied with the simple expression of their particular understanding of life, and eschewed any concern for effectiveness in its worldly application.

Nations do not escape as easily. We can even ratchet up our current dilemma by reference to Augustine; that most officially and unofficially religious fellow who opined that while it was natural for an individual to die, such was not the case for a nation. Thus was opened the door to war and more questions.

The Pilgrims were not uncertain about their aims.

Perhaps the next time we consider breaking a country into little pieces we should decide ahead of time what we are willing to do with it.

Highway information now just a 511 call away

Thanksgiving, the official start of the holiday season, can be one of the busiest driving holidays. The state Department of Transportation reminds travelers to buckle up for safety and plan ahead by calling 511 or logging onto the 511 Web site by following a link from the Web site of the DOT's Transportation Management Center at www.tmc.state.ri.us.

By simply dialing 511 within the state, travelers can access real-time traffic information, updates, which are provided directly to 511 from the TMC around the clock, enable motorists to plan in

advance based on road and traffic conditions in order to arrive on time and relaxed.

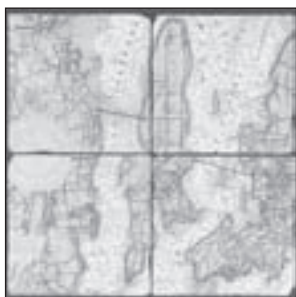
“The 511 system is a useful way of getting critical information out to the public when events and emergencies occur,” DOT Director James R. Capaldi P.E. said. “Ultimately, it helps drivers avoid traffic delays while minimizing congestion as much as possible.”

When heading home from traveling outside the state, motorists can retrieve information from the 511 system by dialing 1-888-401-4511.

Those heading to northern New England can dial 1-800-ICY-ROAD for Vermont road and tourist information; 1-866-282-7579 to learn what's happening in New Hampshire, and 1-888-282-7578 to access road information for Maine. While in those states the same conditions apply to Rhode Island — motorists can simply dial 511 and bypass the out-of-state numbers.

Launched March 2005 with grant funds provided by the Federal Highway Administration, the Rhode Island 511 system is administered through a national consortium of 30 states. Rhode Island's system logs on average about 5,000 calls per month. More than 95 percent of the calls are for traffic information. The peak calling hours are between 4 and 6 p.m., which is consistent with the peak commuting hours.

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Working farms and wildlife in Jamestown: A survey

Have we heard from you?

This Fall, the University of Rhode Island, in cooperation with EcoAsset Markets, Inc., has mailed someone in every household of Jamestown a survey asking about opinions, choices and values for working farms and wildlife in Jamestown.



If you have received a survey, please take the time to mail the completed survey back. This is a unique opportunity for Jamestown to establish itself as a focus of nationally important studies to help integrate conservation and farmland amenities with the economy and life of a local community. As Jamestown has developed, much historic farmland and wildlife values have been replaced and new pressures on farming have created pressures on remaining wildlife. Jamestown residents have an opportunity to identify to what extent they value some of the amenities provided by working farms. For the study to fully represent Jamestown, it is critical that nearly everyone who received a survey respond.

If you have already sent your completed survey, we thank you. If you have not, please do so soon. We are planning to send a replacement copy to anyone who has not responded by November 27th. If you have any questions or comments, please contact us below.

Stephen Swallow, Professor, University of Rhode Island
tel: 401-874-4589 email: swallow@uri.edu (with subject line: Jamestown Survey)

Emi Uchida, Research Assistant Professor, University of Rhode Island
tel: 401-874-9196 email: emi@uri.edu (with subject line: Jamestown Survey)

P.S. Correction on the survey: On the last page of the survey, Question 4, the correct question is "Is your primary residence Jamestown?" Please cross out the word "Wakefield", replace it with "Jamestown" and answer the question accordingly. We apologize for the editing error.

Wishing You a Happy Thanksgiving!

THE JAMESTOWN PRESS

From the Staff of