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OPINION

Farewell to the war presidency

BY RICH LOWRY

Holding forth in the Oval Office, President George W. Bush is as upbeat and self-confident as ever, even if markedly grayer. Yet a sense of yesterday hangs about him, not just because Barack Obama is already de facto president, but because the war on terror that animated his presidency has faded in the public mind.

To talk to Mr. Bush about his presidency is to enter a time warp, a world where the 9/11 attacks loom large, where the transformation of the Middle East is an urgent priority, and where the president's energy is devoted to managing a very hot war in Iraq.

The most consequential event of Bush's presidency was a terror attack, and the most consequential decision was an invasion of another country. The world will hold nasty surprises for Mr. Obama, but he clearly hopes to focus on the homeland — and not in the sense of "homeland security." The central indices of his presidency probably won't be people liberated and terrorists killed, but jobs created and energy-efficient light bulbs installed.

The public has done worse than reject President Bush, it has — despite all the heat still generated by his administration's controversies — passed him by. As the Arabs say, the dogs bark, but the caravan moves on. And Bush feels it.

"Over time," Mr. Bush says, "because we were effective at protecting the homeland, the fear of an attack began to dissipate. People knew that there was an attack in London and that would raise concerns, but there wasn't this, you know, on-edge awareness anymore. And so the job of the government is in some way self-defeating toward keeping the country alert and aware."

In defending his decisions, Mr. Bush hearkens back to that bygone era. "You cannot isolate Iraq without placing it in the post-9/11 environment and what life was like," he says.

As Condi Rice recently said, "If you were in a position of authority on Sept. 11th, then every day since has been Sept. 12th." So it was for Mr. Bush, with the management of two wars on top of it.

Recalling Iraq's descent toward full-scale civil war in 2006, Mr. Bush says:

"This was all-consuming during this period of time."

With the surge, Mr. Bush set out to create conditions in Iraq that would make the war sustainable for his successor. He succeeded. The new Iraqi-U.S. security agreement, Mr. Bush says, "enshrines a presence and the doctrine of return on success that gives the president, the new president, some latitude."

John McCain campaigned on the success of the surge and on the same sense of urgency about the war on terror as President Bush. People didn't reject Mr. McCain's views so much as the very notion of another war presidency.

Mr. Bush has been diminished by events and his own failures, but there's a largeness to his character — in his sincerity and courage — that will only be appreciated long from now. He's confident "conservatives will rebound," with "new ideas" and "new blood." A first step is adjusting to a world where a war presidency seems passé. ■

Rich Lowry is editor of the *National Review*.

GUEST OPINION

A 'gift' for generations to come

BY GINA DOWNS

Gina Downs is the Director of the Citizens Transportation Coalition

South Floridians were just handed an early Christmas present. We get to hold on to our national treasure, Alligator Alley, for a few more months.

The proposed sale of our asset has been postponed. Why? Because the economy has come to a screeching halt, or perhaps, some would say, has taken a nosedive. In other words, no \$25,000 proposal deposit was received by FDOT on Dec. 22. No bidders. No takers. No deal.

Before we all lift a cup of cheer, be reminded that this is but a short hiatus. The Alley continues to be viewed by Gov. Charlie Crist as an easy, short-term fix for the state budget woes. Those budget woes will deepen next year. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (www.cbpp.org), Florida will face a \$5.8 billion deficit in fiscal year 2009-10. That is estimated to be 22.6 percent of the general fund. The current \$2.3 billion deficit (about 9 percent) pales in comparison.

Alarming numbers? Yes. Unforeseen numbers? Hardly.

With 44 states running a deficit budget today, one could scarcely expect the

fourth most populated state — one of the leaders in the housing bubble explosion and subsequent implosion — to escape the draconian consequence of a recession. Proceeds from the Alligator Alley sale provided no plug in the financial cavity this year. Next year, that cavity will need a root canal.

As the deficit mushrooms, so will the desire by Gov. Crist to surrender public roads and public bridges to the highest bidder. The pool of bidders may shrink, their ability to finance 80 percent of the sale price may lessen, but their desire to invest in a relative monopoly with guaranteed and growing income will not diminish.

Pinellas Bayway in Pinellas County, Sunshine Skyway in St. Petersburg, Beach Line Expressway near Orlando have already made the Governor's "dream team." Alligator Alley in South Florida served as the proving ground. Rest assured the governor and FDOT will become more adept at handling impediments and hurdles. The pesky public will be schmoozed and bamboozled by public-relations professionals with their glib political-speak. Look for the privatization process to proceed with lightning speed in the future. Just don't expect transpar-

ency or "Government in the Sunshine."

The public — whose tax dollars paid for the public asset — can be led like lemmings into the privatization cesspool, or they can secure their assets now and for future generations. Florida needs to pass legislation to protect public assets from privatization.

In 2005, the Supreme Court, in the 5-4 Kelo decision, allowed the use of eminent domain to transfer land from a private owner to another private owner in order to eliminate blight. Soon after, the vast majority of states enacted their own state laws severely inhibiting or limiting the use of eminent domain as liberally allowed by the Supreme Court ruling.

The time is now for our legislators to severely inhibit the Governor's plan to market public assets. Any grade-school student would see the folly in burning the furniture to heat the house. Every elected official knows this is but a short term Band Aid that does more harm than good to future state budgets.

Instead of a Christmas gift that is fleeting, how about a gift that lasts a lifetime or better yet, for generations? Keep the public in public assets — permanently and unequivocally. It's up to our legislators. ■

MOMENTS IN TIME

• **On Jan. 1, 1962**, the Beatles audition for London record company Decca on the same day as Brian Poole and the Tremeloes. Decca signed the Tremeloes, but not the Beatles. The Tremeloes first hit the charts with "Twist and Shout," later also done by the Beatles. The Tremeloes band is still active today.

• **On Jan. 2, 1811**, Sen. Timothy Pickering of Massachusetts becomes the

first senator to be censured by the Senate. Pickering was accused of violating congressional law by publicly revealing secret foreign-policy documents communicated by the president to the Senate.

• **On Jan. 3, 1938**, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, an adult victim of polio, founds the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, which he later renamed the March of Dimes Foundation. In response

to a fundraising appeal, the public flooded the White House with 2,680,000 dimes and thousands of dollars in donations.

• **On Jan. 4, 1974**, President Richard Nixon refuses to hand over tape recordings and documents that had been subpoenaed by the Senate Watergate Committee. Marking the beginning of the end of his presidency, Nixon would resign from office in disgrace eight months later. ■