

FBI has lost its superhero image



CAYLA CARR

The story is all too familiar. A plane is hijacked and lives are threatened. But in the 1996 movie *Executive Decision*, Kurt Russell and the good guys recover the plane from the terrorists, land it and save the day. Unfortunately, this was not the case on Sept. 11, 2001. These tragic events were not quite as comfortable with the superpower, invincible guise that movies had created for America. Perhaps even the Federal Bureau of Investigation was complacent with its insuperable image. Citizens viewed the FBI as resilient and trusted the bureau to keep them safe. The American people were living in a bubble until that fateful September day.

On May 27, FBI attorney Coleen Rowley released a lengthy letter that had been sent to FBI director Robert Mueller, as CNN reported, "accusing the bureau of deliberately obstructing measures that could have helped disrupt the 9/11 attacks." In Rowley's letter, she blames the bureau for neglect and raised doubts as to whether the public should place their faith in the FBI. According to Rowley, agents had dismissed her requests to wiretap and search Zacarias Moussaoui, who was later discovered as a conspirator in the attacks.

The *Washington Post* reported on May 29 that numerous warnings were issued by field agents about al Qaeda members in flight training. There is no explanation as to why the FBI overlooked these leads, but Mueller described 9/11 as inevitable. Since the attacks, Americans have grown accustomed to living in uncertainty and fear of the likelihood of future attacks. Prior to 9/11, these attacks were thought by most as unlikely, placing too much trust in government funded investigative agencies.

The Council on Foreign Relations released a survey that suggested most experts agree human intelligence is the most

important factor to "penetrate terrorist organizations." It is obvious now that human intelligence was inefficient prior to 9/11. Several other FBI blunders have been made before and after the attacks that managed to avoid the public eye. The Russian spy who infiltrated the FBI, Robert Hanssen, was not discovered by his peers for almost two decades. In April 2002, *The Washington Times* reported that FBI senior executives ignored periodic warnings to investigate Hanssen and revamp internal security.

The most puzzling case in the aftermath of 9/11 has been the Anthrax epidemic. In March, a statement was released by Mueller explaining that investigators had not yet solved the Anthrax puzzle. This was a blow to the American public. Citizens had placed a great amount of trust in the FBI before 9/11, but now, that trust has dwindled.

It is indisputable that real life is not like the movies. Citizens have seen too many movies where the American superpower saves the day. The American government has not had the technology to watch every move Americans make like the movie *Enemy of the*

State suggests. If this were the case, terrorists plots might have been easier to detect.

The *Austin American-Statesman* reported on May 29 that an overhaul proposed by Mueller is expected to make terrorism prevention the top priority of the bureau. One-fourth of the agency will be permanently assigned to counterterrorism measures. It is a relief to know that the FBI recognizes its need to change. Americans have learned their nation is susceptible to outside attacks and it is not invincible as movies portray. Americans are agreeable to the fact that Superman and Spiderman are fictitious characters, and America cannot be saved by a single man.

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JEFF SMITH • THE BATTALION

Hybrid engine vehicles worth consumers' money

Normally when you say the word "green" in association with environmentalism, the typical reaction is indifference, annoyance or outright hostility.

For all the power of the environmental lobby and the relative support of the general populace for breathable air, drinkable water and activities such as recycling, there is still a social stigma attached to environmentalism. However, as far as vehicles are concerned, more Americans need to open their minds and their pocketbooks to so-called "green" vehicles, which are quickly progressing from the realm of the fantastical to the truly practical.

The most common of these vehicles utilizes an engine that combines gasoline-combustion power with electrical energy. These hybrid engines never need recharging and consume a fraction of the amount of gas that similar-sized cars with standard engines do. This saves the driver money on gas and limits the amount of exhaust emissions released into the air. The problem is that most people do not know about these vehicles or assume that they are naturally inferior in terms of size, power or affordability.

One of the first hybrid cars to be mass marketed in the United States was the Honda Insight, which boasts upwards of 60 miles per gallon of gasoline. However, this two-seater has a horsepower rating of around 70, so many Americans

can easily dismiss it for lack of size and power.

Since the Insight's release, Toyota and Honda have released sedans with hybrid engines that get 48 miles per gallon. The Honda Civic Hybrid is the exact same size as its gas-powered counterpart with the exact same safety specifications. The hybrid Toyota Prius can, in terms of spaciousness, hold its own against such American standards as the Ford Taurus. However, the Civic Hybrid and the Toyota Prius get almost double the gas mileage of most cars on the road. All three of these cars run about \$20,000, which is cheaper than most new vehicles on the market.

The Prius and the Civic Hybrid are rated at about 85 horsepower, which leaves a big problem in the mind of the American consumer: power. The country that spawned muscle cars has always been, and probably always will be, obsessed with cars that can muster more power than the driver will ever need or use. Therefore, under the guidance of the environmentally conscious Bill Ford, Jr., grandson of Henry Ford, the Ford Motor Company is developing the Ford Escape HEV, an SUV with a hybrid engine rated at 40 miles per gallon, four-wheel drive capabilities and the comparative power of a 200 horsepower gasoline engine. This vehicle is slated for release in 2003.

This release date and the increased number of

"green" vehicles is beneficial for consumers because Congress is currently considering the adoption of the Climate Change Technology Initiative. If adopted, during the four-year span of 2003-2006, consumers may be able to take tax credits of up to \$3,000 for buying such environmentally-conscious cars.

On top of all of this is money the owners will save at the gas pump. Citizens of Maryland that purchase "green" vehicles get an additional \$1,500 off their state income tax. In California, drivers of hybrid and electric vehicles can use carpool lanes even if they are the only person in the car, and many places have parking spaces with the same relative vicinity as handicapped parking reserved for drivers of these eco-friendly cars. More states are also considering adopting such incentives.

More reasons not to buy such vehicles are being alleviated, and many perks are being offered to sweeten the deal.

Car companies are wisely aiming their development at the areas important to consumers. Now, the consumers need to make sure this attention is rewarded. Hybrid cars may not be exactly what the public is used to, but time and research have improved them considerably and more development will only make them better. There needs to be a market base to justify this initiative. If Toyota, Honda and Ford can show that "green" cars will turn a profit, more companies will begin offering their own, leading to even

more improvements in the design and capabilities of these cars. This success can also inspire other environmentally conscious pursuits.

In the past 20 years, BMW has been conducting extensive research into the energy-producing capabilities of liquid hydrogen. Liquid hydrogen has proven to be a very effective energy source and has been used as fuel for a small fleet of prototype cars developed by BMW. Moreover, when the liquid hydrogen is combusted with oxygen, the waste product is water. In the past four years, Aston Martin has switched from the solvent-based paints used by most car companies to water-based paints, resulting in less pollution and a safer workplace. In the past two years, the Ford Motor Company has begun renovating its historic Rouge complex. Employing a team of architects and environmental experts, Ford has spent billions to make the plant as environmentally conscious as possible.

If these companies can take such measures, then other companies can as well, especially if they think it will improve sales. Consumers need to start exercising the most powerful public opinion tool in America, their wallets, and show support for the cars and companies that are doing more than their competitors to protect their workers, their customers, and the planet.

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Food stamp users must be educated

America is world-renowned for its diverse population of millions of people, but with all these millions, some need a little financial help. The U.S. government has a compelling compassion for the needy. Welfare programs

certainly help take care of impoverished citizens, but people are getting too comfortable with free handouts and food stamps, and this will eventually lead to an array of unhealthy — and still needy — U.S. citizens.

The Food Stamp Program (FSP), began in the 1930s and eventually became a nationwide entitlement program in 1971. According to Foodstamps.org, this welfare program was founded "to help people buy and eat nutritious food, be stronger and make up a more productive society." Requirements for food stamps include such restrictions as no more than \$2,000 in a household's countable resources and a gross monthly income of less than 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Anyone who meets all the requirements as a right to receive food stamps.

This program, along with other welfare programs, has certainly made its mark in helping those in need. After paying its bills, a family with food stamps will have something to eat.

Food stamps, which are available in paper form or with an electronic benefits (EBT) debit card, can be used to buy foods for the household such as breads, cereals, fruits and vegetables, meats, dairy products and even seeds and plants which produce food. They cannot, however, be used in purchasing any alcohol or tobacco products, any non-food items such as pet foods, soaps, paper products, or household supplies, vitamins and medicines, or hot foods that are already prepared. The only part of FSP's objective that is not met is the health aspect. People who use food stamps are not using them to buy healthy food,

but instead tend to stock up on junk food and snacks.

The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program safeguards the health of low-income mothers and children up to age five by providing nutritious foods and supplements, information on healthy eating and referrals to health care. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers the FSP at the federal level through its Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), needs to supply the same kind of healthy eating information to their recipients. With all the junk food available now, it is easy for anyone to live an unhealthy lifestyle, so every individual receiving food stamps should attend a food preparation course. We as a nation, and especially the government being in a position to do so, need to take initiative and educate those who are less privileged on how to take care of themselves through proper nutrition and diet.

People have gotten used to the government helping them with few questions or regulations. They are dependent on the government to take care of them financially and physically. Our government needs to start informing its welfare recipients on what is healthy and what is not, so the needy citizens of this nation will live longer and healthier lives.

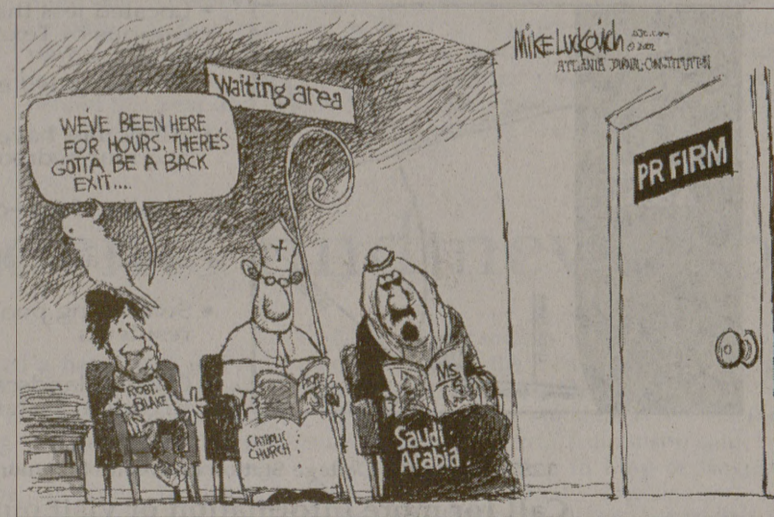
Educational classes on healthy eating need to be available to all participants in the Food Stamp Program, as well as nutritional counseling.

This nation was founded on the idea of freedom, but freedom comes with a price. With freedom comes responsibility. We have a responsibility to take care of those in need, and the needy have a responsibility to take care of themselves. Unless we start educating on healthier lifestyles, this country's efforts at charity will continue to weaken the health of those that depend on us.

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