

# The Delray Democrat

## Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid<sup>1</sup>

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When Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the oath of office, the country was mired in the depths of the Great Depression, with 25% of the nation's workers unemployed and millions of Americans homeless. In his inaugural address he spoke frankly of the challenges facing the country but insisted that they could be overcome:

This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

And they were overcome. Armed with the hope and resolve FDR provided, and protected by the safety net programs created under his administration, we emerged from the pit of the Great Depression stronger than ever, and we created a middle class that was once the envy of the world. That middle class has been disappearing for the last four decades, and what remains of it is more to be pitied than envied.

All this is the work of the modern Republican Party, which has turned FDR's famous maxim on its head. For them, "fear itself" is not a crippling emotion to be avoided but an electoral tool to be employed. It is fitting that their political philosophy is best summarized by the horror-film tagline, "be afraid, be very afraid."

Republicans have neither ideas nor programs to offer voters, and their platform is at odds with what polls say voters want, but they excel at fearmongering. It worked in the 1980s, the early aughts, and 2016, and it will be the centerpiece of the reelection campaigns of Marco Rubio and Ron DeSantis.

The "nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror" about which FDR warned may be the Republicans' only tool (other than voter suppression of course), but it is a highly effective one. They may be clueless about governing and their insouciance about serving the public would do Marie Antoinette proud (viz. Katrina, the mortgage meltdown, and the pandemic), but they'll keep getting elected in Florida so long as enough people fall prey to their lies. It's your choice:

- Be afraid of "illegal aliens." Or understand that the proper term is "undocumented immigrants," that they take jobs no native-born Americans want, and that they commit fewer crimes than either documented immigrants or native-born Americans commit. But "be afraid."

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<sup>1</sup> *The Delray Democrat*, July 2021, p. 5.

- Be afraid of “critical race theory.” Or understand that it’s not being taught in Florida and that the real threat is the new Republican education [directive](#) that literally bars teaching about slavery and its horrors. See p. 2, column 2.
- Be afraid of “socialism.” Or understand that’s how Republicans demonized Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act. Are you a socialist if you refuse to give up these benefits?

Today, however, there *is* something to fear other than fear itself. There is a very real possibility that their voter suppression laws and fearmongering will allow Republicans to recapture Congress in 2022 and overthrow what is left of our democracy in 2024. That is not “a nameless, unreasoning unjustified terror which paralyzes” but rather a well-defined, wholly justified dread that must stimulate us to act as if our world depends upon it—because it does.