

## Careful What You Wish For

**I** WOULD LIKE TO DRAW YOUR ATTENTION to the opening salvos in this issue's Letters to the Editor, under the subhead "Taken to Task." They refer to a single paragraph in John Armor's cover story in the September/October *Contingencies* called, "Til Death Do Us Part." That paragraph is reproduced in one of the letters so I won't reproduce it here. I'll just give you a minute to turn to Page 6 and read it.

Back? Good. Perhaps—if you try very, very hard—you can interpret that paragraph as saying that all Muslims are terrorists. I read that paragraph a couple times during the editing and proofing process (and again about 100 times just now), and I still don't see it. The article never even mentions the word "Muslim," only the word "terrorist." The inference that one automatically implies the other seems counterproductive at best.

But some readers did infer an anti-Muslim bias in that paragraph and they said so. And what they said and recommended is published in the Letters to the Editor section for all to see. Because that's their opinion and they have a right to express it—unedited and uncensored. (One correspondent elected not to be published.)

Let me be very clear. If Mr. Armor had indeed said, or even implied, that all Muslims are terrorists, you would not have read it in *Contingencies*.

But Mr. Armor wasn't expressing that opinion. He was reporting fact. If you read his response on Page 6 you'll see which facts he was reporting. And if you were to read the entire article instead of that one paragraph, you'd discover that it's not about terrorists or Muslims or even actuaries. It's about turnover in the U.S. House of Repre-

sentatives and how difficult it is to unseat an incumbent. It's full of numbers and statistics and charts that support the observation that relatively few members of Congress have to worry much about job security.

Does Mr. Armor have opinions? You bet. He's in favor of term limits. If you didn't pick up on that, you weren't paying attention. Does he say, or even think, all Muslims are terrorists? No. He does not.

Could Mr. Armor have written that paragraph any differently? Sure. Everything can be rewritten. He could have been clearer about the facts, or cited his sources on the spot. But even rewriting wouldn't have changed those facts or made them any more palatable to those who object to them.

Mr. Rahim is right about one thing, though. This is a sensitive time. In the wake of 9/11, our country is engaged in its most agonizing debate since the invention of our Constitution. How do we balance our cherished rights and freedoms against our natural right and need to physically protect ourselves? Especially when many of those rights can be cunningly used against us.

One of those freedoms is the right of free expression. It applies to everybody. Now is not the time to treat it cavalierly. Even in the pages of an association magazine. ●



EDITOR

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