

CHRIS MATTHEWS

For some reason, this Anthrax scare is tougher on the younger people. It's the people in their 20s who fret the most loudly. They wait to be tested. They want their Cipro. They want people like me to stop our "denial" and get with the program.

They also want people like TV news anchor Tom Brokaw and U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle, South Dakota Democrat, to wise up. It's a generational thing, and I have my suspicions why.

One theory is that we older people have been through worse. Some men still hide jars of quarters in the basement for fear of another Great Depression. World War II and Korea took men from the classrooms and threw them into battle. The early Cold War had us kids huddled under our desks waiting for the big "flash" that meant the beginning of World War III and the end of the world.

Then came the terror of Vietnam. That conflict cost us 10 times the deaths of the World Trade Center. Some went willingly and courageously. Some were grabbed and found the courage for the fight. Some just sweated it out back home. You think Anthrax is bad? You should have seen the draft.

My second suspicion is more subtle. It has to do with freedoms lost over the past few decades.

When I came to this city 30 years ago last spring, you could walk right into the office of any senator or

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member of Congress. You could go anywhere you wanted in the U.S. Capitol at any time of day. There were no metal detectors, no ID cards to show — nothing. The right to petition Congress was as literal as the Constitution. If you wanted to pester some politician, you went ahead and did it.

The same was true of the president. The bus from the Friendship Heights area of Washington, D.C., drove right in front of the White House on the way to Capitol Hill.

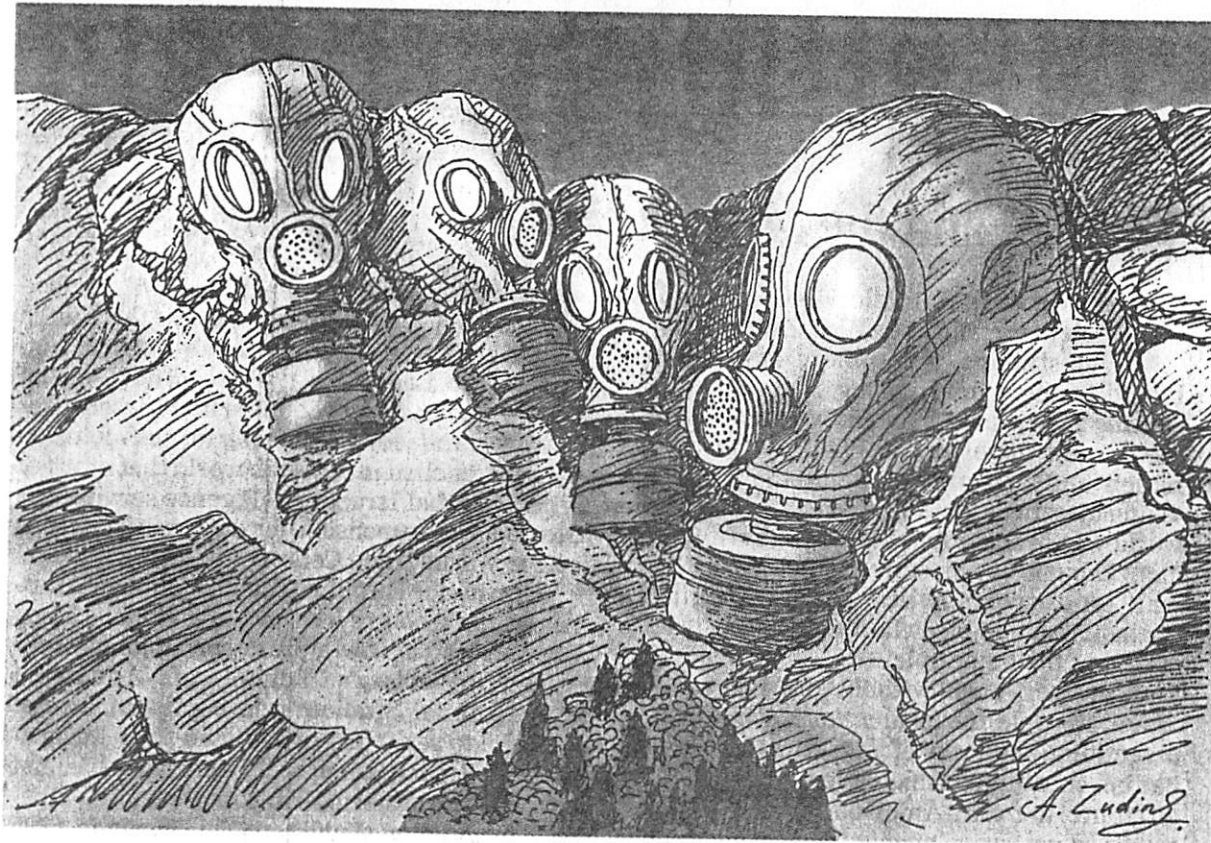
When Richard Nixon got into trouble, a driver could honk his horn as he passed 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., and the occupant upstairs knew it meant, "Resign."

All this is gone. Checkpoints and tiger teeth guard the Capitol plaza where Franklin D. Roosevelt said we have nothing to fear but fear itself. You can't bring a truck anywhere near the Hill. Pennsylvania Avenue is closed to traffic from 15th Street to 17th Street.

Even airline passengers are restricted while flying. If anyone leaves his seat during the 30-minute approach to Reagan National airport, the plane heads directly for Dulles.

Want to write your senator? Forget it. That letter postmarked Trenton, N.J., and addressed to Tom Daschle, closed down the mailroom.

It took years for this shutting of the democratic gates. First came that bombing in the Capitol in '71. Then came Oklahoma City. Then, Sept. 11 and the fourth plane, which was brought down by courageous passengers, and which people figure



was headed for the Capitol.

This thing called "terrorism" has wormed its way inside. Anthrax spores are in the Senate mail. Little particles of hell are in the Capitol air. Staffers with nervous systems once wired to the news cycle now wait in line for Cipro. The big ques-

tions of foreign policy and fiscal policy have shrunk to the small one: How do I stay alive?

"We have some planes," we hear the hijacker's voice. "Just stay quiet and you'll be OK. . . . Nobody move please. . . . Don't try to make any stupid moves."

We older people refuse to buy it. Maybe it's because we've been through worse. But maybe it's because we've been through better.

Christopher Matthews is a nationally syndicated columnist.