

Lying in Politics

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Conservatives have traditionally defended values of truth and integrity while attacking dishonesty and lying. During the Clinton administration, conservative defenders of the value of truth like William Bennett, constantly attacked Bill Clinton for lying and dishonesty. Yet few, if any, conservatives have spoken up to criticize the Bush administration for its systematic policy of deception and lying.

As Paul Krugman has demonstrated in his New York Times columns and recent books, Bush administration economic policy has been based on “fuzzy math” and outright lying concerning deficit figures, about who would get the giant tax cuts, and concerning the effects of the tax breaks for the rich on job production and social services. President Bush said in 2002 that his tax cut would generate 800,000 jobs and repeatedly claimed that “everyone knows” that tax cuts create jobs. Yet major economists took out newspaper ads saying that this simply was not true and since Bush’s initial statements another million jobs have been lost, with over three million jobs vanished en toto since Bush became president.

Bush administration spokespeople continue to lie about the extent of the deficit and its potential harmful effects. Bush and Cheney have repeatedly claimed that the Bush tax cuts constitute only 25% of the mushrooming federal deficit, while the White House’s own Office of Management and Budget shows that the tax cuts account for 39%. As Paul Krugman and others have repeatedly shown, the projected record deficit will be much larger than current Bush administration figures that do not include sky rocketing expenses for U.S. programs in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Moreover, it is by now well known and documented that Bush’s policy of launching a preemptive strike on Iraq was based on deception and lies. Bush and others in his administration constantly made false claims about alleged Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction” and the threat that the Iraqis posed to the U.S. and the entire world. The failure to find such threatening weapons and media exposure of claims that U.S. and U.K. intelligence agencies were skeptical of these claims have led to critical scrutiny of the case for war offered by the U.S. and Britain. In the latter country, a major inquiry is now going on presided by Lord Hutton into government deception over Iraq.

Robert Greenwald’s remarkable 2003 documentary Uncovered contrasts statements by members of the Bush administration including George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Condoleeza Rice with statements by former members of the US intelligence and political establishment demonstrating that Bush administration claims were utterly bogus. Former intelligence analysts dissect Colin Powell’s address to the United Nations claiming to document Iraqi possession of weapons of mass destruction and show in detail how key statistics Powell appealed to were simply false, his satellite imagery pictures claiming to present Iraqi weapons were appallingly misinterpreted, and his major claims concerning the immediate threat

of Iraqi weapons were utterly false in what has to be the nadir of US diplomatic argumentation before an international audience. The documentary also presents critics such as former Ambassador Joseph Wilson convincingly arguing that Bush administration claims concerning ties between Al Qaeda and the Iraqi regime are completely unproven, while a variety of critics argue that the Iraq occupation has created new terrorist enemies for the US and has not made the US safer, as Bush administration officials continually claim.

In my books Grand Theft 2000 (2001) and From 9/11 to Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy (2003), I criticize “Bushspeak” as a mode of systematically engaging in the discourse of deception and lies. I document a wealth of Bush falsehoods in the 2000 election campaign, the 36-Day Battle for the White House, fallacious claims about his economic policies, and other deception and lies on the economy, environment, energy policy, and foreign affairs. It has therefore been interesting to see best-selling books emerge by Al Franken with the title Lies (And the Lying Liars Who Tell Them) and by Joe Conason called Big Lies: The Right-Wing Propaganda Machine and How it Distorts the Truth, with another book by David Corn on The Lies of George W. Bush: Mastering the Politics of Deception demonstrating Bush administration mendacity. In addition, Web-sites like www.spinsanity.com expose lies from all sides of the political spectrum, while MoveON.org has a web-site www.misleader.org, George Soros has a web-Site www.wedeservethetruth.com, and www.Bushwatch.com has long posited examples of Bush administration lying.

Now is the time for liberals, conservatives and those who believe in truth in politics to demand straight talk from the Bush administration and other politicians, and for the media and critics of the politics to lying to take the Bush administration to task for its Big Lies. As the history of recent totalitarian regimes demonstrates, systematic deception and lying rots the very fabric of a political society, and if U.S. democracy is to find new life and a vigorous future there must be public commitments to truth and public rejection of the politics of lying.