

The following is a random selection of definitions of buzzwords and doubletalk.

AMERICA, GOD BLESS THE U.S. OF

Simultaneous exclamation of fervent piety and patriotism.

Usage: An indisputable and unsurpassed way of closing important speeches. Has a ring of devout authority.

"And so, goodbye, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America." (Ronald Reagan, Jan. 11, 1991)

"God bless you and God bless the United States of America." (George Bush, Jan. 20, 1989)

AMERICA BASHING

To patriotism what sacrilege is to religiosity.

"If they are going to call us Japan bashers, let us tell it like it is: This is stone-cold America bashing. I think we should stand up for No. 1, America." (Rep. James A. Traficant, Jr., July 11, 1991)

AMERICAN PEOPLE, THE

A catchall way to generalize about the attitudes, interests, and qualities of an entire population.

Usage: They should be depicted as good-spirited, perceptive, and blameless.

"A national effort, entailing sacrifices by the American people is now under way to make long overdue improvements in our military posture. The American people support this effort because they understand how fundamental it is to keeping the peace they so fervently desire." (Ronald Reagan, June 9, 1982)

"I think I understand all the American people." (Sen. Robert Dole, Jan. 2, 1988)

"I intend to do everything I can to see that the AIDS immigration prohibition remains in place. If I lose, the American people will lose also." (Sen. Jesse Helms, Jan. 14, 1991)

"Throughout Operation Desert Storm, the American people stood behind our Armed Forces without regard to partisan politics." (Rep. Dante Fascell, March 5, 1991)

"There's nothing wrong with the American people." (Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton, June 15, 1991)

BAD PRESS

Negative publicity.

Usage: Can imply that spurious reasons or questionable motives account for being singled out for critical news coverage.

"Indeed, it appears that (Prince Edward) Sound is well on its way to recovery. Exxon, on the other hand, continues to suffer from bad press." (Rep. Philip M. Crane, Sept. 11, 1990)

BAILOUT

Rescue of failing private institutions via massive financial subsidies from the U.S. Treasury.

Usage: Often conveys necessity, summoning images of bailing out a boat in danger of sinking. Comparisons to household budgeting can be helpful, however irrelevant.

Antonym: givaway at taxpayers' expense.

BIG BUSINESS

An ominous-sounding moniker that casts large corporations in a bad light.

Caution: Use of this term, while perhaps suitable for campaigners who rely on small, individual donations, is hazardous if depending on corporate contributions.

BIG GOVERNMENT

A pejorative for some federal, state and local agencies.

Usage: Customarily selective, this phrase refers to agencies regulating corporate activities, or social service programs aiding poor and moderate-income people. It is rarely applied to military or police institutions.

"You can also count on me to continue fighting government waste, higher taxes, and the growth of big government." (Rep. Mel Hancock, Dec. 1990)

The best view of big government is the rear-view mirror as you're driving away from it." (Ronald Reagan, March 24, 1982)

BOYS ON THE BUS

An often contemptuous term for the press corps.

No one elected the boys on the bus.

CHARACTER

An amorphous dollop of purported virtue, easily ascribed to almost any fellow politician who is not a convicted felon. Considering the source, often a rather dubious plaudit.

Lloyd Bentsen is "a man of character and ability." (Sen. Strom Thurmond, July 13, 1988)

COMPROMISE

Can be the height of deft pragmatism or the depth of depravity.

CONFRONTATION, POLITICS OF

Assertiveness from a rival that threatens to crew up a politician's plans.

CORPORATE CITIZEN

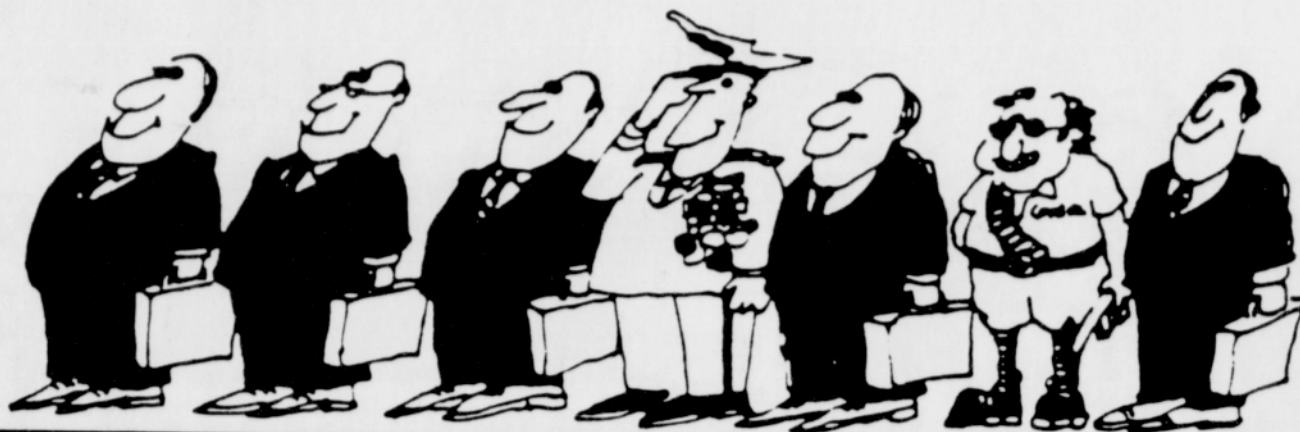
Makes a CEO at a Fortune 500 company sound like John Q. Public.

U.S. POLITICAL DEFINITIONS

SPECIAL INTERESTS:



NATIONAL INTERESTS:



SIGNE WILKINSON

DEMOCRACY

Commonly a system where each adult has a vote, and the wealthy have more powerful ways to determine government policies.

"Democracy rests on the voice of the people." (Lyndon B. Johnson, May 25, 1967)

DIRTY TRICKS

Political maneuvers that are (a) sneaky, (b) uncovered, and (c) done by the other side.

Antonym: hardball politics.

ECONOMIC CHAOS

Actually the economic conditions may have been carefully orchestrated rather than chaotic for the corporate strategists standing to gain from layoffs, shutdowns, etc. But "economic chaos" sounds like no blame could be affixed anywhere.

"We need to be creative and fight for ways to help our timber mills survive economic chaos — and the bill I'm introducing today is one way to do that." (Rep. Jolene Unsoeld, June 26, 1991)

EXPORTING AMERICAN JOBS

Usage: A good way to imply that foreign countries are to blame for unemployment in the United States.

"Today we are exporting American jobs at an alarming rate and importing almost everything else, even our food." (Rep. John Bryant, 1991)

FAITH IN AMERICA

Woe be unto any national politician who does not proclaim its ever-deepening wonders.

"I have never had more faith in America than I do today." (Jimmy Carter, July 15, 1976)

FEEDING FRENZY

Usage: When disclosures threaten your power, declare that they are part of a "feeding frenzy." Evokes imagery of aggressive journalists and opposition politicians as wacko piranha tearing innocent human flesh from bone.

FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM

Usage: Whatever your economic agenda, insist that the "free enterprise system" will benefit.

"Small business is the key to the success of our free enterprise system." (Rep. Richard Baker, May 8, 1991)

"In this long and critical struggle, the American system of free enterprise must be our major weapon." (Robert F. Kennedy, Aug. 1963)

GREENIES

Usage: Denouncing "reds" is passe, but "greenies" can be blasted as dangerous tree-huggers bent on fiendish schemes.

"The greenies have led us into the crisis in the Middle East... The rabid environmentalists felt it was more important to jeopardize the lives of our brave American servicemen than risk the death of a single snail darter." (Rep. Tom DeLay, November 3, 1990)



Cannon Beach, Oregon

KINDER GENTLER

Contrary to some previous perceptions, not callous.

Usage: A good way to proclaim compassionate desires along the way to explaining that you're not about to support a lot of government spending to help people. You can beat this rhetorical bongo endlessly.

"I want a kinder, gentler nation." (George Bush, Aug. 18, 1988)

MIDDLE CLASS

A category — often intentionally vague — blurring distinctions between households with annual incomes of \$20,000 or \$100,000.

"Opportunity for all also means that the government ought to help the middle class as well as the poor when they need it." (Bill Clinton, May 6, 1991)

"In effect the middle class and the working poor have been called upon to pay for the huge income tax cuts at the federal level." (New York Gov. Mario M. Cuomo, Aug. 9, 1991)

NATIONAL NIGHTMARE

Recent events that were difficult, disruptive, traumatic.

Usage: May as well play into people's hunger for denial and their eagerness to put stark realities behind them, as though deeper and continuing dysfunctions were not involved in recent events.

"My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over. Our Constitution works. Our great republic is a government of laws and not of men. Here, the people rule." (Gerald R. Ford, Aug. 9, 1974, when sworn in as President)

OLIGARCHY

Rule by the few over the many.

Warning: Not for describing the governance of the United States. Confine to other countries.

PARTY UNITY

In other words, shut up and get with the program.

"In an election campaign, party unity is essential." (Richard M. Nixon, 1960)

SMEAR

An incoming accusation of variable accuracy that threatens to draw political blood.

"The best and only answer to a smear or to an honest misunderstanding of the facts is to tell the truth." (Richard M. Nixon, Sept. 23, 1952)

VOCAL MINORITY

People who are too loud for their numbers, and presumably wrong to boot.

Usage: A nice touch for suggesting that people making a lot of noise in favor of a certain position must be out of step.

"If a vocal minority, however fervent its cause, prevails over the reason and the will of the majority, this nation has no future as a free society." (Richard M. Nixon, Nov. 3, 1969)

WORKING CLASS

Usage: Acceptable for occasional use. However, you must never publicly speak of a "ruling class" in a domestic context.

"Working class families put in more hours at work and less time with their children in 1989 than they did in 1979." (Bill Clinton, May 6, 1991)

"The Power of Babble" is excerpted from the book of the same title, which has just been published in paperback by Laurel Books. Norman Solomon is a former Portland political activist and coauthor of "Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in the Media." A chapter from that book appeared in the July, 1991 issue of the NCTE.