

THE MEDIA HAS FOLLOWED & NOT INFORMED POPULAR OPINION



DAVID HORSEY*

BY BOB WILLIAMS

Al Gore never claimed to have invented the Internet, but the media did (and still does) a terrible job of correcting the record and helped his opponents go after him as untrustworthy. The same media that perpetuates this charge on no evidence but Republican Party spin (by never correcting the record and sometimes still quoting, without comment, people who repeat it), is now finally forced to notice facts about the Presidential Spinners which should have been clear for a long time.

This administration is a masterful public relations factory and they have depended on U.S. newspapers and corporate airwaves franchises to go along with woeful underestimation of our intelligence.

George Bush told Bob Woodward (*Bush At War*), "I do not need to explain why I say things. That's the interesting thing about being the President. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel like I owe anybody an explanation."

Now he wants to establish again, by fiat, "The President considers the matter closed."

This has worked before.

It worked when he refused to discuss or have government agencies reveal his shameful military service record. He has refused to allow the Security Exchange Commission to release the records of its aborted investigation into charges of insider trading when he sold his Harken Energy stock just before it tanked, and his administration has gone to unprecedented lengths to prevent the release of records of the apparently considerable influence of Enron's Ken Lay exerted on formation and implementation of national energy policy.

The body investigating 9/11 says the relevant government agencies are not cooperating in providing the information it needs to assign responsibility and thus prevent a recurrence. The Environmental Protection Agency report had references to "global warming" just edited out.

There is a longer list of coverups by decree from what many commentators claim is the most secretive administration in many years.

We have had many revelations of how far these men (and Condoleezza Rice) have gone to spin the facts and personally write the headlines, of how they have successfully forced the media to abandon unfavorable stories by labeling them "politically motivated allegations against a very popular President."

One such very clear story that just died at birth was the deceptive claim about the aircraft carrier landing, an event that both proclaimed the end of the Iraq war and established the kickoff of the Presidential Image Control Campaign Season.

The claim was that the President had to take a jet because the carrier was out of helicopter range. The facts are: the carrier was well within range, was actually moved further out to allow them to claim it was "more than 30 miles off the coast," was kept moving in circles so it would come no closer, and was turned so the cameras would not see the San Diego skyline as the President bounced around, helmet tucked under his arm, and as he spoke.

The media let him off once again on that one, following and not informing popular opinion.

Now the President hopes to quiet things again (to quote the BBC) by "assigning blame to his CIA Director" and having him "fall on his sword."

But despite Bush's wistful thinking, it is too obvious that the problem is not who left the forged evidence in the State of

the Union speech, but rather, who put it into the speech in the first place, in spite of the widespread knowledge it was false.

Colin Powell didn't use it in his own following speech to the United Nations because, as he said about other and similarly false claims he was under Bush's pressure to make, "This is B.S. I won't say it!"

What is in danger of being forgotten however in the current media fear of "going too far" is:

~Bob Woodward reported that the very night of 9/11, Rumsfeld suggested the day's events might provide an excuse for going after Saddam Hussein.

~There might have been leaks from our intelligence agencies right along that they were under pressure to provide evidence of WMD and of links between Al Qaeda and Iraq.

(A *New York Times* story from early January of this year is headed, 'Split at CIA & FBI On Iraq to Al Qaeda' and says in the second paragraph of this long article, "Some analysts at the CIA have complained that senior administration officials have exaggerated the significance of some intelligence reports about Iraq, particularly about its possible links to terrorism, in order to strengthen their political argument for war, government officials said.")

(Don Rumsfeld created a Pentagon intelligence agency apparently because he wasn't getting what he wanted from the established ones.)

~Every specific claim of evidence about WMDs by Bush, Powell, Rice, Rumsfeld and company has been shown to be false on the ground or has proven to be unverifiable.

~No WMD have been found, though the media has been negligent in making this clear to the perhaps third of Americans who believe otherwise, and it is almost certain that even if they exist in any form, they were in no form or danger of being used.

Our government doesn't even believe they were there, it seems clear, since their "disappearance" has not impelled increased security alerts. One might think we would be on "Cherry Red Emergency Status" until these elusive weapons were found, if anyone in power were truly worried about them.

Now the spokespersons for Bush are making the talk show rounds trying to convince us that the President's intentionally deceptive language, "according to British intelligence reports" was "technically accurate" even though they all knew it was based on forged documents.

The media should take this opportunity to reclaim its role as questioners of attempts to mislead the people, and as critics of any obvious falsehood that is put forth for purely political purpose.

It is not too late to have truly informative media which recognize the ethical requirement that a free society depends on a well informed citizenry.

The role of media as a PR wing of the politically powerful should now be under suspicion as never before. The most powerful country in the world should have a media at least as great as the British or Israeli press. Our democracy is in the balance.

Bob Williams lives and teaches in Hood River.

*David Horsey, editorial cartoonist for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, has been awarded a Pulitzer Prize for 2003. He was awarded his first Pulitzer in 1999.

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DAD

BY ANNA MYERS

My dad was in Vietnam a little over a year. During his time there he was exposed to Agent Orange. My dad got sick ten years after he left Vietnam.

In August of 1984 Mom told me that Dad said I was the best present he ever got. When I was 4 months old, my dad became terminally ill. My dad held me for the last time 13 months later — just days before he passed away.

I have very few memories of my father, except for what my mother tells me. He died because no one checked on him even after my mother made arrangements with the Veterans Affairs to have a nurse check on him. He was a victim of the Veterans Affairs system.

Eighteen years later I have become a victim of the same system. I have been fighting for "Helpless Child" (disability) benefits for the last year. I have these disabilities because my father was exposed to "Agent Orange" and other chemicals during the war. Yet no one at the VA is willing to help me.

The VA is a bungled system because it is controlled by our own government with a mission that seems to be in contradiction to helping vets and their families. Why would people want to join the military when they can expect no support from our government when they need it most?

In conclusion, I think either the government should help our vets and their families with more support or turn to a socialized medical system to support everyone who needs help. We must take care of our own people.

Anna Myers is a 2003 graduate of Astoria High School.

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