

THE ROMNEY/RYAN REIGN OF ERROR

57% Truth Telling for Romney/Ryan vs. 71% for Obama/Biden

By Nick Gier

*A lie can travel halfway around the world
while the truth is putting on its shoes.*

—Mark Twain

*Deceiver, dissembler
Your trousers are alight
From what pole or gallows
Shall they dangle in the night?*

—William Blake, “The Liar” (1810)

We’re not going to let our campaign be dictated by fact checkers.

—Neil Newhouse, Pollster for the Romney Campaign

Some of the most honest people I know are my Mormon relatives, friends, attorneys, and university administrators, so why does Mitt Romney have such difficulty with the truth? Mormon Richard Stallings, former Democratic Congressman from Idaho’s heavily Mormon 2nd District, is distressed: “He has run several ads that lie about the President and about Romney’s positions. When called out, he ignores the facts and continues to run the distortions. Examples include his claim the president has raised taxes, (he hasn’t) and that the president is trying to remove the work requirement from welfare (he hasn’t).”

I find it ironic that Republicans used to say that Obama’s great speeches were simply a smokescreen for deceit, but now Romney is being praised for his fluency and mastery of debate. When I used to debate fundamentalist Christians, my opponents always said that my good performance was because I was channeling Satan. I of course thought that I simply had logic and facts on my side.

The American people are fortunate to have two presidential candidates who are eloquent, but they would like a chief executive whom they could trust to tell the truth. I have now collected 37 distortions and falsehoods from Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan. What disturbs me most is that after many of their statements have been refuted, Romney and Ryan still continue to use them. For example, a week after fact checkers found that the six studies Romney cited for his tax plan did not support his math, Ryan repeats the falsehood in his debate with Biden. The truth is still tying her shoes as

these lies run half way around the world. As they complete their circuit they knock truth completely off her feet.

I will begin with the scorecard from the Truth-o-Meter at PolitiFact.org, the Pulitzer-winning fact checking organization. As proof of balance, I offer the fact that PolitiFact ruled that the “GOP voted to end Medicare” the “Lie of the Year 2011.” Those who still dismiss PolitiFact (or FactCheck.org) as biased are obligated to evaluate each of the well-researched and balanced answers. The burden is on them to prove the fact checkers wrong. In a few instances I have decided that their conclusions are incorrect.

Out of 513 statements tested by PolitiFact, Obama and Biden have a total of 147 mostly false, false, and pants on fire. That is a record of 71 percent truth-telling. Out of 231 statements Romney and Ryan have 100 mostly false, false, and pants on fire. They were telling the truth only 57 percent of the time. Taking Ryan alone is worse: he is telling it straight only 48 percent of the time, while Biden is at 71 percent. On the basis of 45 percent more statements tested, the Democratic ticket was on fire 10 times while the GOP duo’s pants were scorched 20 times.

False Claims on Taxes and the Budget

- *In the first debate Romney began by declaring that Obama has given us “a bigger government” and is “spending more, taxing more, and regulating more.”* According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are 416,000 fewer government employees than when Obama took office. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that spending is now the lowest in decades. From 1982-85 Reagan increased spending by 8.7 percent versus Obama’s spending over four years has risen only 1.4 percent. The total taxes Americans pay are at the lowest level since 1950s. Finally, Obama has issued fewer regulations (1,004) than Bush II did (1073) in his first term.
- *In the first debate Romney denied repeatedly that his plan would produce \$5 trillion in tax cuts and pointed to six studies that proved him right.* These studies, however, do not dispute the simple arithmetic of leaving the Bush tax cuts in place and reducing tax rates 20 percent across-the-board. The studies instead attempt to show how Romney could pay for those cuts without increasing the deficit. (In the second debate Romney admitted this.) Dylan Matthews of the *Washington Post* (9/27/12) checked each of analyses closely, and he concluded that the authors don’t save Romney from huge deficits or increasing taxes on the middle class.
- *In the first debate Romney charged that Obama has doubled the deficit.* False. At the end of Obama’s first year the deficit was \$1.4 trillion and over four years he has brought it down to \$1.1 trillion. As a share of the economy the deficit has been reduced from 10.1 percent in 2009 to 7 percent now. If Romney was talking about

the total national debt, he was also incorrect. During Obama's term the national debt has risen 52 percent not 100 percent. In stark contrast, Reagan nearly tripled (187 percent) the debt in his first three years. See www.NickGier.com/DebtGOPObama.pdf.

- *During the primaries Romney maintained that in his 2012 State of the Union Address Obama “didn’t even mention the deficit or debt.”* If Romney had read the text, he would have found six references.
- *In the first debate Romney promised that he would not reduce taxes on the rich.* The plan that he released, however, reduces the tax rates for everyone by 20 percent, eliminates the estate tax, repeals the alternative minimum tax, and the higher taxes on the wealthy in Obamacare. The last three would obviously favor the rich. A Brookings Institution/Tax Policy Center study concluded that, if Romney is to avoid deficits, 95 percent of Americans would pay more in taxes while the top 5 percent would pay less. The well respected non-partisan Joint Committee on Taxation has calculated that closing all deductions and loopholes “would only produce enough revenue to lower tax rates by 4 percent.” Romney’s plan is mathematically impossible.
- *Romney claims that Obama “will raise taxes on the middle class by \$4,000.* FactCheck.org has declared this a false statement, and Politifact has given this a “pants on fire,” for a record 18. This is especially egregious if Romney means Obama’s FY13 budget, which continues the Bush tax cuts for all but the wealthy. Ryan’s budget (passed by the House) will indeed raise taxes on the middle class by \$2,732. See factcheck.org/2012/10/romneys-4000-taxtale/.
- *Romney claims that he implemented his health care plan in Massachusetts without raising taxes.* Romney actually raised corporate taxes and hundreds of fees that, according to FactCheck.org, were “as high as \$3 billion over four years.” In addition, the federal government provided half the funds to start the program. We all chipped in to pay for Romneycare.

False Claims on the Economy and Unemployment

- *In his debate with Biden, Ryan maintained that Obama promised “unemployment would never get to 8 percent.”* He made no such promise. This estimate of the employment rate was contained in a report (complete with strong disclaimers) released by the President’s Council of Economic Advisers. These economists were correct in the number of jobs the stimulus would create, but they underestimated the number of jobs the Great Recession would eliminate. On this point here is their

disclaimer: “Forecasts of the unemployment rate without the recovery plan vary substantially. Some private forecasters anticipate rates as high as 11 percent.”

- *During the primary campaign Romney declared that “more Americans have lost their jobs under Barack Obama than any president in modern history.”* Exempting the first year of all presidents since World War II, a proviso that is always granted, George W. Bush was the only one who had a net loss of jobs—1.31 million. According to free-market *The Economist* Obama now (October 2012) has a net gain of 125,000 jobs after the loss of 5.2 million jobs to the Great Recession.
- *Romney claims that “women account for 92.3 percent of the job lost under Obama.”* PolitiFact rechecked its data and consulted more experts after the Romney campaign complained, but they held firm with “mostly false.” Since the Great Recession began, 3.4 million American males have lost their jobs compared to 1.8 million females.
- *Romney has charged that Obama “gave the auto companies to the UAW.”* The stock that the union received in return for its negotiated health benefits has been placed in an independent trust that the union can use only for that purpose. UAW equity is not risk free because of the volatility of the stock market.
- *During the primary campaign Romney issued this dire warning: “We are only inches away from no longer being a free economy.”* According to the libertarian Cato Institute, the largest decrease in economic freedom since World War II came during the Bush II era, when U.S. dropped from 8.55 to 8.04 on a scale of 10. During Obama’s first year, the score climbed to 8.06, fell to 7.96 in 2010, and then to 7.8 in 2011. (The U.S. is now in 10th place just ahead of Denmark). If the Cato scale was a yard stick, one inch of losing our economic freedom would be a score of .277, which is far, far below the worst Cato score of 4.08 for Zimbabwe.
- *At the GOP debate on January 7, Romney declared that Americans make 50 percent more than Europeans do.* This of course is not true. According to data from the CIA, average incomes per person are higher in Luxembourg and Norway, and 10 other European countries are within 50 percent or less of the U.S. Without adjusting for purchasing power, this list would have been much longer. Most European countries have higher costs of living.
- *Romney constantly complains that President Barack Obama wants to make the U.S. a European welfare state.* This of course is false. Most European welfare states have paid maternity/paternity leave (up to 18 months), universal child care, universal health care, and universal elder care. I challenge anyone to point out where Obama has committed the country to these admirable goals.

False Claims on Energy

- *In the first debate Romney maintained that “about half” of Obama-supported green industry companies “have gone out of business.”* FactCheck.org answers this with

the title “Romney’s Clean Energy Whoppers” at factcheck.org/2012/10/romneys-clean-energy-whoppers/. Of the 26 firms given loan guarantees only three with only 6 percent of the loans have filed for bankruptcy. The loan support for Solyndra, the GOP’s favorite whipping boy, was started under the Bush administration. As *Time* magazine’s Michael Grunwald writes: “The generation of renewable electricity has doubled on Obama’s watch. The stimulus has financed the world’s largest wind farm, a half-dozen of the world’s largest solar farms, the nation’s first refineries for advanced biofuels, a new battery industry for electric vehicles, and unprecedented investments in cleaner coal.” Ten million American homes are now powered by wind turbines.

- *In the first debate Romney charged that “all of the increase in natural gas and oil has happened on private land, not on government land. On government land, your administration has cut the number of permits and licenses in half.”* Igor Volsky of *Nation of Change* corrects these errors: “Production from federal lands is higher, not lower. The oil and gas industry is sitting on 7,000 approved permits to drill, that it hasn’t begun exploring or developing.” It is also crucial to point out that federally funded research developed the new fracking techniques that have made the new oil and gas boom possible.

False Claims on Obamacare and Medicare

- *On campaign trail Romney has said that “Obama is ending Medicare as we know it.”* Both sides are making this bald claim and both sides are wrong.
- *In his debate with Biden, Ryan claimed that his Medicare proposals were bipartisan.* The truth is that Democratic Senator Ron Wyden withdrew as co-sponsor of Ryan’s bill because it “pulls the safety net out from under the poorest and most vulnerable seniors.” Earlier Clinton’s top economic adviser Alice Rivlin, after working with Ryan on Medicare reform, reported that she could not support his new plan. Under it seniors would have to pay much more because the growth rate for his vouchers would not keep up with rising medical costs. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that Medicare recipients would be paying 40 percent more by 2022.
- *Romney, Ryan, and the Republicans have distorted the \$716 billion in savings (not cuts) in Medicare spending over 10 years.* First, it must be noted that this same amount, on Ryan’s recommendation, has been taken completely out of health care by the GOP House. Second, there is no reduction in benefits to seniors. Third, \$216 billion will be saved by phasing out subsidies to Medicare Advantage, a Cadillac, but sometimes highly restrictive, private insurance option that costs 14 percent more than Medicare. A Harvard study has found that over 8 years Medicare Advantage

has overpaid providers by \$282.6 billion. Fourth, if Ryan had actually done the hard negotiations to achieve these savings, then he would of course been praised by the GOP.

- *In the first debate Romney assured that seniors over 60 did not need to listen to his plans for Medicare reform.* If Romney repeals the Affordable Care Act (the GOP House has voted to do just that), then (1) seniors will pay more for drugs (the “doughnut hole” will remain); (2) they would pay on average of \$347 more per year in Medicare premiums (Obamacare reins them in); (3) seniors would be responsible for their own preventative care (from which 26 million Americans benefited saving an average \$614 each due to the Affordable Care Act); and (4) Medicare would go broke six years earlier.
- *Romney, Ryan, and the GOP keep scaring Americans that Obamacare is a government take-over of health care.* PolitiFact declared this as “Lie of the Year 2010.” The principle of the individual mandate was originally a Republican idea, which many Democrats—even those in the Massachusetts Legislature—rejected but Romney promoted. Obama and the Democratic Congress rejected the tried and true principle of single payer option in favor of a much less efficient system of free choice among private insurance options.
- *Even though it is not true, Romney keeps saying that Independent Payment Advisory Board of the Affordable Care Act will put “the government between you and your doctor” and Ryan says that “it will deny care to seniors.”* The board’s task is to monitor Medicare payments and to propose reductions, upon the approval of Congress, to those payments. The Affordable Care Act is explicit in excluding the board from doing these alleged actions: it cannot “include any recommendation to ration health care, raise revenues or Medicare beneficiary premiums, or otherwise restrict benefits or modify eligibility criteria” (Section 3403). The GOP should praise attempts to control costs rather than distort them and make false political claims. Sarah Palin called this board a “death panel” and she won the 2009 Lie of the Year.
- *Romney said recently that “we don’t have people who die because they don’t have health insurance.”* A 2009 Harvard Medical School study estimated that 45,000 American die each year because they are uninsured. Harvard Doctor Steffie Woolhandler phrases her conclusions plainly: “For any doctor it’s completely a no-brainer that people who can’t get health care are going to die more from the kinds of things that health care is supposed to prevent.” To put a personal face on this tragedy—unique in the industrial world—there is the sad story of Republican activist Beth Rickey, who died alone in a motel room in Santa Fe on September 12, 2009. She was seriously ill, had no health insurance, and had spent her life savings on what little medical care she could afford.

- *In the first debate Romney said that he would keep Obamacare's ban on preexisting conditions.* Immediately after the debate Romney spokesman Eric Fehrnstrom said that Romney misspoke, and that Romney "will give the states initiatives and money so that they can manage these decisions on their own." Romney's "plan" was later corrected to apply only to "continuous coverage," which of course leaves out those uninsured or periodically insured. FactCheck.org has agreed that Obama is correct to call Romney out on this, one of the most crucial and popular aspects of Obamacare.
- *In the first debate Romney said under Obamacare "up to 20 million might lose health insurance."* Romney cited a CBO study which instead concluded that employer-sponsored coverage would most likely decrease by 3-5 million. These people would not be forced out of these plans, many of which have become very expensive; rather, they would choose better deals in Obama's free-market insurance exchanges.

False Claims on Defense and Foreign Policy

- *Romney, Ryan, and the Republicans have constantly charged that Obama has apologized for American actions in the world.* PolitiFact has used every possible definition of an apology and has found nothing to substantiate this piece of libel. Politifact has now issued a "Pants on Fire" (for a record 17) for Romney's bald-faced one.
- *In his debate with Biden, Ryan criticized Obama for waiting two weeks to respond to the attack on the consulate in on September 11, 2012.* The very next day and the day after the President condemned this "act of terror" as "outrageous and shocking." Furthermore, the requests for more security were for the embassy in Tripoli not for this outpost in Benghazi, which was not yet an official consulate. Biden was correct to say that neither he nor Obama received these requests, which are strictly the purview of the Department of State.
- *Romney charged that Obama "could have gotten crippling sanctions against Iran. He did not."* Politifact has ruled that this statement is mostly false. If Obama could have persuaded Russia and China, even tougher sanctions would have been implemented.
- *Both Romney and Ryan charge that Obama will make huge, arbitrary cuts to the defense budget.* These cuts are of course part of the dreaded sequestration to which both parties have agreed. Romney's promise to increase this budget by \$2 trillion dollars is something that the Pentagon has not requested and, worse, something that will increase the deficit dramatically.
- *Ryan claimed that Biden "went to China and said that he sympathized with and wouldn't second-guess their one-child policy of forced abortions and sterilizations."* Ruling this statement as mostly false, the researchers at PolitiFact explain: "Biden

did not use the word ‘sympathize’ and didn’t endorse the one-child policy. Instead, he said that he understood it and would not second-guess it. Days after the speech, his spokeswoman said he specifically condemned coercive birth limitation policies.”

- *Ryan asserted that Obama was in New York City at the same time as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and that he failed to meet with him.* They were both at the opening of the United Nations, but they were not there on the same day. Vice-President Biden scored some excellent points by saying that he has known “Bibi” for years, and that he and Obama talk on the phone with him all the time.
- *In his debate with Biden, Ryan claimed that the Obama administration called Syrian President Bashar Assad a “reformer.”* What Hilary Clinton did say was that “many members of Congress of both parties who have gone to Syria in recent months have said they believe he’s a reformer.” She made it clear that this was not Obama’s position.
- *In his debate with Biden, Ryan charged that Iran now has “enough fissile material to make five nuclear bombs.”* The fact is that they don’t even have enough to make one bomb. Biden was correct in saying that Israeli intelligence also agrees with this; and furthermore, Iran has no way of delivering a nuclear weapon.
- *On the campaign trail Romney has said that Reagan’s “peace through strength” policy “was the reason why the Iranians released the hostages.”* The fact is that a hard-bargaining Carter administration negotiated their freedom before Reagan took office.
- *Romney has also claimed that “The U.S. military is at risk of losing its military superiority because our Navy and Air Force are smaller.”* The U.S. defense budget is still larger than all the world’s combined. During Reagan’s first term “active ship force levels” were 571 vessels, but the total was down to 441 by the end of 8 years of Reagan and Bush I. During the first 6 years of Bush II the number was only 281, but since then it has risen to 285 and Obama has asked for another 15 ships.

The Republicans’ problems with truth began in earnest with Richard Nixon, but Ronald Reagan continued the tradition, more by bumbling than by cunning. (His constant exaggerations of Soviet military build-up, however, were deliberate deception.) Mark Green’s *Ronald Reagan’s Reign of Error* substantiates over 300 major falsehoods that the Great Communicator made during this political career until 1986.

A President Mitt-Mistakes would give the Gipper a good run, but only for a \$10,000 bet. With all that corporate money coming in, I would suggest that GOP advisers consider buying some flame resistant suits and skirts. The Democrats could use a few as well.

Nick Gier taught philosophy at the University of Idaho for 31 years. Read all of his columns on the 2012 election at www.NickGier.com/2012.pdf. Read his columns on Ronald Reagan at www.home.roadrunner.com/~nickgier/ReaganPage.htm.