

Bush's High Crimes Against the Nation

George W. Bush has knowingly deceived the American people on the two overriding policy issues of his presidency — the invasion of Iraq and the deep tax cuts.

Other presidents have lied. Only Bush has repeatedly duped Congress and the public to thwart their exercise of informed consent. He is the first president to use propaganda as the main weapon in selling his policies. Bush's unprecedented pattern of deception may constitute an impeachable offense.

To date, only the deception in Iraq has brought forth the "I" word. The case for impeachment is materially strengthened, however, when Iraq is combined with Bush's 2001 and 2003 propaganda campaigns to convince the public that tax filers with lower levels of income benefited more from his tax cuts than the nation's richest families.

Hoodwinking the public that Saddam posed a perilous immediate danger to the United States is Bush's greatest treachery. New York Times columnist Paul Krugman observed: "If that claim was fraudulent, the selling of the war is arguably the worst scandal in American history."

John Dean, counsel to the president during Watergate, wrote in mid-June: "Manipulation or deliberate misuse of national security intelligence data, if proven, could be a 'high crime' under the Constitution's impeachment clause."

Before the U.S. invasion, the strong consensus based on intelligence community information held that there were only negligible Iraqi ties with al-Qaida, no nuclear weapons program of any consequence, and limited chemical and biological weapons programs at most. Lacking hard facts, as evidenced by his now much-discussed deception in his State of the Union address that Iraq sought to buy uranium in Africa, Bush mixed misinformation, distorted allegations and unsubstantiated rumors to persuade the public of the imminent danger posed by Saddam Hussein.

The experience with the massive tax cuts for families and individuals in both 2001 and 2003 makes patently clear how Bush used the same unscrupulous tactics over time. Moreover, the level of the deception is staggering, as indicated by Bush's 2003 proposal to eliminate taxes on taxable corporate dividends.

Joel Friedman and Robert Greenstein of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities pointed out: "The group with incomes over \$1 million — which consists of about 226,000 tax filers in 2003

— would receive roughly as much in benefits as the 127 million tax filers with income below \$140,000. Stated another way, the top 0.2 percent of tax filers would receive nearly as much from the tax cut as the bottom 95 percent of filers combined."

Claiming that the 127 million tax filers with incomes of under \$140,000 are the big winners when 226,000 of the richest tax filers benefit nearly as much is surely world-class policy deception. But is it a high crime that warrants impeachment, as was the case with Watergate?

Republican operatives breaking into the Democratic Party's national committee headquarters and President Nixon's covering it up clearly constituted crimes. Bush's propaganda campaign to hide how much the tax cuts benefited the rich is more likely to be viewed by the public as the stuff of politics in which politicians make inflated claims about the importance of a proposed policy and its likely benefits and ignore potential problems.

In actuality, the president's purposeful duping of the public on the nation's most critical policy issues strikes at the heart of American constitutional democracy when it robs the electorate of informed consent. This fraudulent act makes a mockery of Abraham Lincoln's immortal words in the Gettysburg Address, "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth."

Deeming presidential deception a high crime under the impeachment clause can open a Pandora's box of problems. Yet, President Bush's actions appear to be a far more serious assault on the Constitution than Watergate. I hold that interpreting Bush's pattern of deception on his most important policy proposals as a high crime against the nation is a necessary step in rescuing American democracy.

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