

THE LIES OF GEORGE W. BUSH

Mastering the Politics of Deception

David Corn



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OF DECEPTION

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FOR WELMOED

When regard for the truth has broken down or even slightly weakened, all things will remain doubtful.

—St. Augustin

Introduction: A False Restoration

“Some people think it’s inappropriate to draw a moral line. Not me. For our children to have the lives we want for them, they must learn to say yes to responsibility . . . yes to honesty.”

—George W. Bush, June 12, 1999

George W. Bush is a liar. He has lied large and small. He has lied directly and by omission. He has misstated facts, knowingly or not. He has misled. He has broken promises, been unfaithful to political vows. Through his campaign for the presidency and his first years in the White House, he has mugged the truth—not merely in honest error, but deliberately, consistently, and repeatedly to advance his career and his agenda. Lying greased his path toward the White House; it has been one of the essential tools of his presidency. To call the 43rd president of the United States a prevaricator is not an exercise of opinion, not an inflammatory talk-radio device. This insult is supported by an all too extensive record of self-serving falsifications. So constant is his fibbing that a history of his lies offers a close approximation of the history of his presidential tenure.

While politicians are often derided as liars, this charge should be particularly stinging for Bush. During the campaign of 2000, he pitched himself as a candidate who could “restore” honor and integrity to an Oval Office stained by the misdeeds and falsehoods of his predecessor. To brand Bush a liar is to negate what he and his supporters claimed as his most basic and most important qualification for the job; it is a challenge, in a sense, to his legitimacy. But it is a challenge fully supported by his words and actions, as well as those of the aides and officials who speak and act for him. The list of falsehoods is long. And only one man bears responsibility for that—the fellow who campaigned in an airplane christened *Responsibility One*.

Does the truth matter to Bush? No more than winning office, gaining a political advantage, prevailing in a policy dispute. He has lied not only to cover up inconvenient matters or facts, or out of defensiveness when caught in a contradiction or an uncomfortable spot. He has engaged in strategic lying—that is, prevaricating about the fundamental elements of his presidency, including his basic goals and his own convictions. He has used lies to render himself and his ideas more enticing to voters and the public. And that raises the question: has lying been critical to his success? Were Bush and his proposals—unadorned by fiction—not sufficiently appealing?

A liar in the White House is not a remarkable development. Most presidents lie, ma
brazenly and with impunity. Only a few have had to pay a political cost for their dissimulations. In 1840, William Henry Harrison, the Whig candidate for president, told potential voters he had been born in a log cabin. Not true at all. He was a scion of an aristocratic family, and he had grown up in a red-brick mansion on the James River in Virginia. But he won the contest. Twenty years later, Abraham Lincoln—his supporters hailed him as “Honest Abe”—was running for president, and his advocates presented Lincoln to voters as a country lawyer. No—he had been reared in rural Illinois—but by the time he was a presidential wannabe, he had become one of the nation’s leading attorneys, representing railroads and other corporations.

In more recent decades, presidents have lied to get their way or hide embarrassing truths. In a press conference at Pearl Harbor fireside chat in 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, looking to persuade Americans that the United States should side with Britain in its war against Nazi Germany, reported that a German submarine had launched an unprovoked attack on the USS *Greer*. Left unsaid was the fact that the *Greer* had been cooperating with a British naval effort to find the sub and destroy it. On August 9, 1945, three days after the United States struck Hiroshima with an atomic bomb, Harry Truman, in a radio speech, said, “The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, in so far as possible, the killing of civilians.” Yet Hiroshima was a *city*, not a military base. Its population at that time included about 350,000 civilians. In May 1960, when the Soviet Union announced it had shot down an American U-2 spyplane flying over its territory, Dwight Eisenhower had his aides say that this aircraft had been only a weather plane that had wandered 1,500 miles off course. But after Moscow produced wreckage of the plane and the pilot of the aircraft, the Eisenhower administration publicly conceded it had been conducting U-2 overflights. At the time, many Americans were genuinely shocked that a White House had lied. Later, Dwight Eisenhower explained why he had subordinates spin for him during the U-2 episode: “When a president has lost his credibility, he has lost his greatest strength.”

John Kennedy, while campaigning in 1960, declared that the United States was on the wrong side of a dangerous missile gap with the Soviet Union. But there was no missile gap in the Soviet’s favor, and Kennedy had received classified briefings reporting that. In August 1964, Lyndon Johnson told congressional leaders that two American destroyers were attacked without provocation by the North Vietnamese in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin. He asked Congress to immediately pass legislation approving a retaliatory attack, and Congress obliged. Years later, the public learned that Johnson had misled Congress.

Richard Nixon lied about Vietnam (as a candidate he claimed he had a secret plan “to end the war and win the peace,” but he did not; as the president, he denied he was covertly bombing Cambodia when he was). He lied about Watergate, too, declaring famously, “I am not a crook.” Turned out he was, and, because he was caught lying, he became the first president to resign.

When the Iran-Contra scandal began to unfold in the fall of 1986, Ronald Reagan said that his administration “did not—repeat, did not—trade weapons or anything else for hostages” with Iran and that “there is no [U.S.] government connection” with the efforts to supply weapons to the Contra rebels fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. He was wrong on both counts. Reagan, a champion falsifier who routinely got facts wrong about his own life and important policy matters,

(most air pollution is caused by trees and plants; submarine-launched nuclear missiles once fired can be recalled), later offered a new and highly original explanation for his Iran-Contra misstatements: “A few months ago I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that’s true, but the facts and the evidence tell me it is not.” That is, he lied because he was out of touch with reality.

Reagan’s vice president—a fellow named George Herbert Walker Bush—also lied about Iran-Contra. When the Iran-Contra affair was first exposed, Bush denied he had been “in the loop.” Yet government documents subsequently released disclosed that Bush had attended many high-level administration meetings on the Iran initiative. And in his private diary—which he managed to withhold from Iran-Contra investigators until December 1992, a month after he lost his reelection to Clinton—Bush had written, “I’m one of the few people that know fully the details” of the Iran affair. More famously, during his acceptance speech at the 1988 GOP convention, Bush issued a solemn vow: “Read my lips: no new taxes.” Two years later, in an attempt to address the budget deficit, he signed legislation raising taxes.

Bill Clinton tried unsuccessfully to escape scandal by lying. “I did not have sexual relations with that woman” has become one of the most well-known presidential falsehoods. The tortuously crafted remarks about his affair with intern Monica Lewinsky that he uttered while giving a deposition in a sexual harassment suit became the basis—or excuse—for a Republican impeachment crusade against him. Clinton survived, but his Monica lies tainted his presidency, divided the nation, and handed Bush and the Republicans ammunition to use in the 2000 presidential campaign. He earned less scorn and less trouble for the lies he told about other, more weighty matters. He promised an initiative on race relations and never produced one. On the campaign trail in 1992, he had pitched a “putting people first” agenda that emphasized federal public investments, but in office he embraced deficit reduction as his first priority. In 1998, Clinton visited Rwanda, the site four years earlier of a horrific genocide, and disingenuously remarked, “All over the world there were people like me sitting in offices who do not fully appreciate the depth and speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror.” The White House had been in-the-know about the massacre while it was occurring. But lying about genocide was apparently not as outrageous as lying about sex.

This very selective history demonstrates there are many varieties of presidential lies. Some concern grand policy matters, some concern secret government activity, some concern personal peccadilloes. Several presidents have misled the public about their health or their status as devoted family men. But what can be considered a lie? Sissela Bok, the author of *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, defines it simply as “an intentionally deceptive message in the form of a statement.” Intentionally? That may get Reagan off the hook—or any other president who truly believes his own spin. But because presidential lies matter more than most—they can lead to war, decide elections, break or make vital policy decisions—I would propose a slightly different standard for White House occupants. If a president issues a statement, he or she has an obligation to ensure that the remark is truthful. The same applies to a presidential candidate who, after all, is seeking an office that comes with the ultimate power. It is not enough for a president or White House contender to believe

what he is saying is true, he should *know* it to be true—within reasonable standards. And for the sake of judging presidents and presidential candidates, the statements of their aides and spokespeople should be measured using the same guidelines, for presidents often send out underlings to speak—lie—for them.

Commanders-in-chief and presidential candidates do commit mistakes and misspeak. Given the amount of information they are expected to possess, this is only natural. Not every error or verbal miscue is a lie. But a president has a duty to acknowledge and correct any significant misstatement he or she utters—especially if that slip somehow worked to his advantage. An untruth that might have been spoken accidentally becomes a lie if a president and his aides permit it to stand.

In addition to serving as the leader of the nation and the head of the government, the president is a major information source. He shares with the public the material gathered by the vast federal government, and often it is information about the most important matters confronting the nation. The public ought to expect a White House to pledge allegiance to accuracy. Citizens in a democracy not only have a right to truth in government, they have a need for it. Without good information, how can they make good decisions?

Yet lies seem essential in politics and government. In a cynical mood, George Orwell once wrote, “Politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia.” That was unavoidable, he noted, because “political speech” is “largely the defense of the indefensible.” Nixon at one point told his friend Leonard Garment, “You’re never going to make it in politics, Len. You just don’t know how to lie.” Did he mean that politics is a down-and-dirty business? Or perhaps he believed that the voting public will not embrace a candidate who doesn’t pander to popular biases and sentiments. Maybe Nixon thought that a leader in a complex and sometimes dangerous world did not always have the luxury of telling the truth. Long before Nixon contemplated the role of truth in politics, Plato referred to “noble lies”—falsehoods told by those in power that supposedly were for the public’s own good.

In *The Prince*, Niccolò Machiavelli noted that honesty in leadership is not always desirable. “How praiseworthy it is that a prince keeps his word and governs by candor instead of craft, everyone knows,” he wrote in the early 16th century. “Yet the experience of our own time shows that those princes who had little regard for their word and had the craftiness to turn men’s minds have accomplished great things and, in the end, have overcome those who governed their actions by their pledges.” Taking a dark view of human interactions, Machiavelli believed that a leader would always find an audience for his lies: “Men are so simple and so much inclined to obey immediate needs that a deceiver will never lack victims for his deceptions.” And history’s most famous political consultant observed that many “princes who broke faith” gained the advantage. But, he advised, “one must know how to mask this nature skillfully and be a great dissembler.”

Which brings us to the current president of the United States. All presidents ought to be truthfully tested. But George W. Bush has invited more than routine scrutiny. As a candidate, he maintained he was pursuing the presidency to return integrity to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. (A good son, Bush obviously believed integrity had been present prior to the arrival of the Clintons, despite irrefutable

proof to the contrary.) Bush was leading a restorative cause (and also calling for massive tax cuts, the partial privatization of Social Security, and what he called education reform). He and his campaign strove to depict Vice President Al Gore, the Democratic nominee, as a say-anything serial fibber, the product of the weasel-words culture of Washington. A candidate who rises to power by denouncing lies warrants more attention when he engages in dishonest behavior.

And these days there is more reason than ever for a president to be beyond reproach. In perilous times, the nation needs a strong and credible leader. The president must be able to strike alliances overseas and inspire at home, in order to implement policies that protect the nation and enhance security in the United States and elsewhere. But if the president is a demonstrable fabricator, portions of the American public and some foreign leaders will be hesitant to rally around him.

Following the horrific attacks of September 11, 2001, Bush and his executive branch assumed greater powers. Congress authorized him to wage whatever war he deemed necessary against whatever forces he held responsible for the suicide-homicide attacks. A year later, Congress handed Bush the authority to launch a war against Iraq whenever he determined that military action was imperative. And he did so. Bush also reserved for himself and the federal government the right to conduct secret military tribunals, to detain non-citizen suspects or material witnesses indefinitely (while withholding information from the public about these detentions), and to monitor conversations between people held in federal prisons and their attorneys.

Because of September 11, Bush became the most powerful president in decades. As he moved to expand the war on terrorism to include military action against Iraq, his aides and outside-the-government champions occasionally suggested that Bush's decisions were informed by intelligence that could not be shared with the public. In essence, the argument was, trust us. In fact, in the middle of the public debate before the war against Iraq, late one night on a Washington street corner, Richard Perle, a hawkish adviser to the Pentagon, made the case for war to me with two words: "Trust me." Democracies are not supposed to operate that way, I replied. But Perle's we-know-best attitude was somewhat representative of the administration he was serving. Bush and his crew have embraced paternalistic secrecy as a virtue. Vice President Dick Cheney adamantly refused to tell the public (that is, the people he works for) what corporate lobbyists he met with while he was crafting the administration's energy plan. Attorney General John Ashcroft urged federal agencies to be as tight-fisted as possible when replying to Freedom of Information Act requests. The Justice Department drew up drafts of harsh anti-terrorism legislation—which challenged civil liberties—without consulting Congress. Bush and his aides have repeatedly noted that much of their war on terrorism must be conducted in the shadows, away from the prying eyes of the public and even from most members of Congress.

If Bush is going to lead the most secretive and opaque administration in years, he must demonstrate his trustworthiness at every turn, especially when he is guiding the country during a war. Lies and secrecy are a troubling mix. When Bush asserts the nation must resort to violence, the public ought to have full confidence in him. Yet as he tried to rally support for war against Saddam Hussein, he repeatedly misrepresented intelligence information. Such distortions—as well as Bush's distortions related to non-war matters—undermine (or should undermine) his credibility as he attempts to convince the public his decisions on war and peace merit support. Lying in office not only poses a potential political risk for Bush, a president who lies is a risk to the nation. He might steer the country

into a war under false pretenses. Or, if he comes to be regarded as untruthful by a significant portion of the public, he might fail to rouse the country for military action that is indeed warranted. A liar at the White House is a national security threat.

Is George W. Bush more of a liar, less of a liar, than his predecessors? A better one, a worse one? Are his Cabinet members and aides more or less honest than those of previous chief executives? It may well be that Bush has pushed the envelope further than recent presidents. But if his consistent reliance upon deceptive arguments to support the major initiatives of his presidency is unprecedented, it is still distinctive. Comparisons to previous administrations, though, are unimportant. Bush is the president the nation has now—at a point when honesty in government is needed as much, if not more, than ever. And he was the leader who—after winning office in a bizarre climax, having polled 500,000 fewer votes than his opponent—promised to bring the nation together to work with political foes, to change the nasty tone of Washington. Such noble goals cannot be achieved by a president who soils the Oval Office with lies.

Bush, certainly, does not always lie. On the campaign trail, he stated he would stick with his tax proposal—which did not poll well—no matter what public opinion surveys said. He kept his word. He promised to confront Saddam Hussein. That happened. He said he would drill for oil in the Alaskan wilderness, seek a partial privatization of Social Security, and appoint conservative judges. Once in office, he moved in each of these directions. But this book is not a study of those instances when Bush spoke or acted honestly. A president wins no points for behaving properly. Integrity ought to be considered the default position. Lies deserve the attention and exposure.

There is the risk a volume of this sort can be seen as a one-note endeavor. Bush lied here, Bush lied there, Bush lied once again, and so on. But lies, in part, made this president, and lies frequently have been the support beams of his administration. An examination of Bush's lies turns out to be one way of charting and scrutinizing much of the Bush presidency. (And this book does not document every single lie.)

“Facts are stupid things,” President Reagan once malaproposed. He meant to say “stubborn.” Indeed they are. It is beyond argument that Bush has lied more than once. This book will show he has trampled the truth often—without (as of yet) paying an obvious price. His lies did not turn off the 40 percent of the voting public that chose him or the significant majority of Americans who approved of his performance in office following the 9/11 attacks and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. But regardless of what he accomplishes during his tenure in the White House—be it four years or eight—a fair-minded reading of the record cannot escape the conclusion that Bush has failed to achieve what he claimed as one of his prime objectives. He has not been a president of integrity. The Bush White House has been no beacon of honesty. This president has treated the truth in the manner his predecessor treated an intern.

1. A Dishonest Candidate

“I have been very candid about my past.”

“It’s time to restore honor and dignity to the White House.” So declared George W. Bush during the 2000 presidential campaign. In one of his first ads, an earnest-sounding Bush told television viewers in Iowa he would “return honor and integrity” to the Oval Office. His promise to escort these values *back* to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue—after you-know-who had done you-know-what in the Oval Office and then *lied* about it—was often the emotional crescendo of Bush’s stump speech. With solemnity, Bush told the crowds that, should he be fortunate enough to win the election, on the day of his inauguration he would not only lift his hand and swear to uphold the Constitution, he would swear to uphold the “honor and the integrity” of the presidency. His supporters ate this up and cheered wildly.

Bush’s professed commitment to honesty was a constant chorus during the campaign. It was also a false claim. As he barnstormed across the country, Bush left a wide wake of distortions and deceits.

He was no pioneer in this regard. To campaign is to abuse the truth. Candidates exaggerate their assets, discount their liabilities, hype their accomplishments, downplay their failures. They hail their proposals and dismiss the doubts, often fiddling with the facts to do so. A certain amount of shiftiness is understandable, perhaps even acceptable. But in seeking the presidency of the United States, George W. Bush did more than fudge and finagle. He lied about the basics—about his past, about his record as governor of Texas, about the programs he was promising, about his opponents, about the man he was and about the president he would be. Not occasionally, but consistently. Which meant he lied about the central element of his candidacy: that he was a forthright fellow who would indeed bring integrity to the Oval Office. His honest-man routine was a campaign-concocted illusion.

The many lies he told not only served his immediate interests (getting elected), they established the foundation for the deceptions that would come when he reached the White House. The origins of much of Bush’s presidential dissembling can be found in the 2000 campaign. In that endeavor, Bush and his handlers fine-tuned a political style that included the frequent deployment of misleading statements, half-true assertions, or flat-out lies. Perhaps most importantly, during the campaign, Bush and his colleagues could see that lying worked, that it was a valuable tool. It allowed them to present Bush in his past, and his initiatives in the most favorable, though not entirely truthful, terms—to deny reality when reality was inconvenient. It got them out of jams. It won them not scorn but votes. It made the arduous task of winning the presidency easier. And the campaign, as it turned out, would be merely a test run for the administration to follow.

“I don’t get coached.”

Bush began his campaign with a lie. On June 12, 1999, he flew into Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and before several hundred spectators corralled into a hangar, announced he would be a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. For months prior to joining the 2000 parade, Bush had been promoting himself as a “uniter-not-a-divider.” In the hangar, he also presented himself as a tried-and-true moral leader. “Some people think it is inappropriate to draw a moral line,” he said. “Not me. For our children to have the lives we want for them. They must learn to say yes to responsibility, yes to family, yes to honesty.” The Texas governor, who had been reelected to his second term the previous November, maintained: “I’ve learned you cannot lead by dividing people. This country is hungry for a new style of campaign. Positive. Hopeful. Inclusive.” He vowed, “We will prove that someone who is conservative and compassionate can win without sacrificing principle. We will show that politics after a time of tarnished ideals, can be higher and better. We will give our country a fresh start after a season of cynicism.”

Bush told his supporters and the assembled reporters, “I’ve learned to lead.” As proof of that, he asserted, “I don’t run polls to tell me what to think.” *Take that, Bill Clinton*. No polls, no negative politics, no self-serving calculations, no ideological or partisan harshness, no more cynical spin, no more falsehoods. But it was all feigned.

Bush’s announcement speech was evidence he would be mounting a truth-defying campaign. Before he delivered this kickoff speech, his campaign had held focus groups in South Carolina, Michigan, and California. At these sessions, according to Roger Simon, the chief political correspondent of *U.S. News & World Report*, the Bush operatives played footage of Bush and asked the people present to turn a knob one way if they liked what they were seeing and hearing and another way if they did not. All this led to a computer-generated graph line superimposed over the film, so Bush and his crew could determine which lines, words, and methods of delivery scored well and which ones stank. Political pros call this people-metering. Using this information, Bush’s chief speechwriter, Michael Gerson, produced 16 draft versions of what would become Bush’s standard campaign stump speech, according to the *New York Times*. True, Bush did not pledge *not* to use this particular device. But he certainly was eager to create the impression he was an I-am-what-I-am politician who would deliver, if nothing else, authenticity. In a later interview, he asserted, “I campaign the way I campaign. And I don’t get coached.” But do uncoached candidates use people-meters? And this was no anomaly. Toward the end of the campaign, *Time* would report that Bush was routinely using focus groups to test key phrases he used on the stump: “personal accounts,” “school choice,” “education recession.”

Pretending to be a straight-shooter who eschewed the cynical mechanics of modern-day politics was but a small contradiction of the image Bush offered his followers in that Iowa hangar. Over the next 18 months, he would engage in business as usual—nasty ads, pandering, expedience-driven position shifting, cover-ups, and assorted spinning. He would not deliver a “fresh start.” Rather, he would embrace—though not in public—most of what he decried about politics. All this would be done to mount a false advertising campaign about a product he knew well: George W. Bush.

“I’ve got a record not of rhetoric,

but a record of results.”

As soon as Bush crashed the race—which already had a crowded field—he was the lead cowboy. He had the name, the money, the endorsements, the organization. And he had a clever slogan: he was the “compassionate conservative.” The most dangerous threat Bush faced was himself—that is, his reputation as a less-than-serious, smirky, syntax-challenged fellow who would rarely be mistaken for an intellectual heavyweight. And in the opening months of his campaign, he had a knack for providing the skeptics evidence. He called the Greeks “Grecians.” He could not identify the leaders of Pakistan, India, and Chechnya. Asked which rendition of the Ten Commandments he preferred—Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish—he replied, “the standard one,” suggesting he had no clue each religion recognizes different versions.

With his not-yet-presidential manner and his miscues on global matters, Bush faced the charge (from Democrats and some Republicans) that he did not possess sufficient candlepower for the job. But for the doubters, he had a stock response, which he would repeat throughout the campaign: look at my record. Bush was arguing that his stint as governor of the nation’s second-largest state—with an economy larger than that of all but ten nations in the world—trumped his lack of foreign policy experience, his odd speech patterns, and his missing gravitas. His accomplishments in Texas were his credentials and showed he was both a fiscal conservative and a “compassionate” conservative. As he said at a Republican debate in Iowa, “I’ve got a record not of rhetoric, but a record of results. In my state, I led our state to the two biggest tax cuts in the state’s history. Our test scores for our students are up.” He also claimed Texas air had gotten cleaner on his watch, that he had passed a patients’ bill of rights, that he had expanded a children’s health insurance program. This was quite an impressive run-down—but it was counterfeit.

Being a champion of tax cuts—past and future—was one of Bush’s key selling points. At one debate he called himself “a tax-cutting person.” He bragged about those “two largest tax cuts” he had achieved in Texas, and he boasted in a campaign ad, “we still have no personal income tax.” Lowering taxes was Exhibit Number 1 in his claim he had been a successful governor.

But this declaration was part Texas tall-tale, and part muddy water. He had not had to do anything to keep Texas from adopting a personal income tax. An amendment to the state constitution—proposed and approved by a Democrat-controlled legislature before Bush took office—prohibited the imposition of an income tax without a voter referendum. Bush was assuming credit for a policy established before he had arrived in Austin.

As for those two big tax cuts, the true results were not much to boast about. Taxes were lowered for some, but much of the enacted tax cuts ended up being largely offset by other tax hikes made necessary by the cuts Bush was hailing. As he campaigned, Bush glossed over the real story of the Texas tax cuts and even mischaracterized the changes he had actually sought.

In 1997, Bush had proposed a major tax overhaul that would lower school property taxes but that would also *raise* the sales tax and impose a new business activity tax. The plan was a direct violation of a promise he had made in 1994, when he first ran for governor. That year, he pledged never to endorse raising the sales tax or creating a business tax. With his 1997 proposal, Bush did both. When

grilled about this broken promise during the 2000 campaign on ABC News' *This Week*, Bush did not say, as might have been appropriate, that circumstances had changed between 1994 and 1997 and that he had been forced to reevaluate his position. Instead, he responded in an all-too-revealing fashion. He devalued his promise by remarking, "There are pledges all the time." Did that mean Bush believed it was okay to make pledges to get elected and not stand by them?

On the 2000 campaign trail, Bush was deceptive about the nature of his 1997 tax plan. He neglected to mention his attempt to boost the sales tax and to implement a new business tax. Nor did he note his package had not been accepted. He had been unable to persuade the legislature to greenlight his entire set of tax cuts and tax hikes. Instead, the lawmakers passed a \$1 billion reduction in school property taxes. And these tax cuts turned out to be a sham. After they kicked in, school districts across the state raised local tax rates to compensate for the loss of revenue. A 1999 *Dallas Morning News* analysis of the state's 1,036 school districts found that "many [taxpayers] are still paying as much as they did in 1997, or more." Republican Lieutenant Governor Rick Perry told the newspaper, "The tax cut didn't stand the test of time as well as many of us would have liked for it to." He called the cuts "rather illusory." In 2003 a report released by the House Research Organization of the Republican-controlled Texas House of Representatives noted, "In 1997, then Gov. George W. Bush sought to revamp state taxes. . . . That effort was unsuccessful, and many of the concerns cited at that time remain unresolved."

The story was also more complicated with the 1999 tax cuts Bush also touted during his presidential bid. That year Bush sought \$2 billion in property tax cuts. The legislature adopted a \$1.3 billion reduction. But it was not relief for everyone. Much of the reduction was targeted to districts burdened by fast growth or construction-related debt. State Representative Paul Sadler, the Democrat chairman of the Texas House education committee, told the *Austin American-Statesman*, "If your district doesn't fall into one of these categories, you're not going to get as much benefit." According to the Texas Education Agency, property taxes dropped in only 36.5 percent of the districts; they stayed flat or went up in 63.5 percent. "As Bush sells the country on his tax-cutting prowess," Dave McNeely of the *American-Statesman* observed in 1999, "school districts back in Texas are raising local taxes anyway."

Sure, Bush had tried to slash *some* taxes (while trying to raise others), but the outcome had been unimpressive. And he was the guy claiming to be presidential material not on the basis of effort made but on results achieved. His efforts had not panned out. Perhaps more importantly than that, Bush's accounting of these episodes—taking credit for tax cuts that benefited a few and that created burdens for others—demonstrated he was not to be trusted when it came to talking about the all-important topic of taxes.

On the stump, Bush claimed that his stint in Texas proved he was also a guy who knew how to downsize Big Government. A Bush ad said he had "reduced the growth of state government to the lowest in 40 years." But according to the *Dallas Morning News*, Associated Press, and the *Washington Post*, during Bush's time in office, the state budget jumped from about \$73 billion to \$98.1 billion—a 34 percent leap that was hardly modest, and larger than the federal government's 21 percent growth rate.

As Bush misrepresented recent history to bolster his standing as a fiscal conservative, he did the same to demonstrate he was a “compassionate conservative” who had accomplished much in healthcare. The Bush campaign’s website portrayed him as having “led the nation in adopting a strong Patients’ Bill of Rights.” That was not the case. In 1995, Bush vetoed a patient protection act, which if passed would have made his state a leader in HMO reform. Two years later, Bush seriously considered vetoing a similar measure that included a provision allowing patients to sue HMOs for malpractice. Only after it became clear the Texas legislature would override his veto did Bush permit the bill to become law, and he did so without placing his signature on it. He had not led, he had not even signed the measure. He had been pushed. In fact, during the debate on the bill, according to *Salon*, State Senator David Sibley, a Republican and an oral surgeon sponsoring the legislation, had griped about the “governor’s office,” saying, “I can’t make ’em happy no matter what I do unless I completely gut the bill.”

To prove Bush cared about kids and their health needs, his presidential campaign maintained he had “signed legislation to create the Children’s Health Insurance Program.” And in an interview with CNN, Bush said, “We’re spreading CHIPs, the CHIPs program out all across the state of Texas. We just passed the legislation necessary to do so.” We? During Bush’s tenure as governor, Texas had the highest number of uninsured children per capita in the nation, according to the *Houston Chronicle*. When the Texas legislature considered providing medical coverage to many of these kids in 1999, the Democrat-controlled House wanted the program to be available to children in families earning up to 200 percent of the poverty level (about \$33,000 for a family of four). But Bush fought to limit eligibility to children from homes with incomes below \$25,000. His lower cap would have prevented about 220,000 of the 500,000 uninsured children who were potentially eligible from qualifying for CHIP coverage. (At that time, Bush’s number-one legislative priority was emergency legislation to provide a \$45 million tax break to the oil-and-gas industry.) Eventually, the Democrats beat Bush on this front, and the 200 percent cutoff prevailed.

After the CHIP fight was settled, Texas state Representative Glen Maxey, a Democrat, claimed Bush told him, “Congratulations on children’s health. You crammed it down our throats.” And an account in *Time* made the point that Bush had dragged his heels in introducing CHIP to Texas and the delay had made possible the not-so-effective 1997 tax cuts: “Bush took his time to start up CHIP. . . . When CHIP finally did start . . . a total of five years had passed since the legislature first attempted to cover many of the same youngsters. The delay freed Texas from having to spend billions of dollars matching state grants, leaving enough money for Bush to pass \$1 billion in tax relief in the 1999 legislative session.”

During the presidential campaign, Scott McClellan, a Bush spokesman, offered imaginative spin about the CHIP episode. Bush’s push for a less extensive program, he said, had been “just a starting point.” Did McClellan mean to suggest that Bush—who would adopt as a campaign slogan the catchphrase “Leave no child behind”—had played politics with the health of 200,000 or so children? What if the legislature had accepted his “starting point”? Would Bush have said to those kids left out, sorry, it was merely a negotiating ploy?

Not only was Bush disingenuous about his health-care record, he wouldn’t even admit the truth about how dire the situation was in Texas. When CBS News anchor Dan Rather asked Bush about

Texas' low national ranking in medical insurance coverage for children (50th) and women (49th). Bush replied, "I think you can find all kinds of statistics to make all kinds of cases. I rest most of my case on that fact that people in Texas like the job I have done. . . . I don't know the statistics . . . but I do know there's a lot of women who are covered." It was a telling response. When confronted with the record—with facts—Bush chose not to address the actual (and embarrassing) statistics. Instead, he did a two-step, suggesting the numbers were wrong, while acknowledging unapologetically that he didn't know the details.

In embellishing his record in Texas, Bush falsely asserted the environment in the Lone Star State had improved on his watch, and that he was responsible for that. Weeks before entering the 2000 race, Bush remarked, "You've got to ask the question, is the air cleaner since I became governor? And the answer is yes." But a *Washington Post* review of this claim concluded, "There is statistical evidence that the air in Texas cities is as foul—and perhaps more so—than when Bush took power in 1995. The frequency of smog alerts in Houston, Dallas, and Austin has risen steeply in the Bush years." Bush could point to a few categories of pollutants in which emissions had dropped, but there was no overall decline. The Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (which was headed by three industry-friendly officials Bush had appointed) maintained that industrial emissions were down 11 percent from 1994 to 1997, but Environmental Protection Agency figures indicated a 10 percent increase. Whichever of these statistics were correct, Texas still ranked first among all states in the number of days with health-threatening ozone levels, first in airborne carcinogens, and first in toxic air releases.

Of all his supposed achievements in Texas, Bush most enthusiastically talked up his education policy. "I've reformed education" in Texas, he proclaimed. Education was a subject with which Bush seemed thoroughly familiar, one of the few areas in which he was a details man. But he was once again dishonestly taking credit for actions for which he had not been responsible. As the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* noted, "A review of the record indicates that the state's most important school reforms—including standardized tests and other accountability measures—took root long before Bush moved into the Governor's Mansion. Education experts, and even Bush aides, say that his predecessors are more responsible for improvements in Texas education." A *Los Angeles Times* investigation of the so-called "Texas miracle" reached the same conclusion. Yet Bush was not pursuing the White House as the official who *continued and didn't end* previously established measures. He was campaigning as the miracle-man.

When Steve Forbes, the millionaire publisher/candidate, threw stones at Bush's education record during a Republican debate, Bush told yet another fib. Forbes accused Bush of dumbing down standards "to the point where in Texas your SAT ranking has gone from 40th in the nation to 46th in the nation." Bush chuckled, "So many half stories, so little time." He then replied, "Test scores in my state, on the NAEP [National Assessment of Educational Progress] test, which compares state to state, showed dramatic improvement. And that's—objective analysis after objective analysis has ranked

Texas as one of the best education states in the country. . . . One reason—our SAT scores have improved since I've been the governor. You need to get your research to do a better job.”

But it was Bush's research that required fact-checking. Texas' NAEP scores, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, had risen significantly in only one category: mathematics. Not so on reading and science. On Forbes' point about the SATs, Bush had flipped the facts. According to the College Entrance Examination Board, the average verbal/math combined SAT score in Texas had *dipped* 3 points during Bush's administration; over the same period, the national average had improved 9 points.

It was true that in the years leading to the 2000 campaign Bush's state had drawn much positive notice in the education-policy community. But that was not because of its SAT scores. As a *Des Moines Register* truth-testing review of a Bush campaign ad maintained, “Student performance, as measured by the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, has improved during his term. But Texas still lags behind many other states on various education indicators.” Later in the campaign, a RAND Corporation study suggested that intensive drilling for the state's standardized tests—tests that Bush championed—might have artificially boosted the encouraging scores cited by fans of the state's testing-based education initiatives.

If Bush had wanted to boast accurately about his years as Texas' chief executive, he could have celebrated how he instituted a state food-aid program for elderly and disabled immigrants after Congress cut them off federal food stamps. Or how he pushed for a measure to speed up adoptions. Or how he signed legislation to raise the salaries for teachers and okayed a bill that forced medical insurers to treat mental illness more like physical health problems. He could have cited increased funding for child care used by mothers on welfare. But with his big-ticket claims to success—taxes, children's health, education, patients' protections, air quality—Bush was sharing one yarn after another. The intent was to sell himself as presidential material by establishing that he had already tackled the major policy dilemmas of modern America. But to compose a compelling picture, he had to color outside the lines. Far outside the lines.

“He was always opposed to abortion.”

Bush was an artful truth-dodger not only on the matter of his short record in government. He also shaved—or denied—the truth when it came to significant pieces of his past: his arrest record, his military service, and an apparent flip-flop on a critical social issue. In each instance, actions he had taken years previously held the potential, if fully exposed, to derail his presidential bid. In each case, Bush ducked trouble by dissembling.

During the 2000 campaign, I came across a 1978 interview with Bush in the *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal* newspaper. At that time, he was running for Congress in West Texas, and he had explained his political views to reporter Sylvia Teague. According to the newspaper, “Bush said he opposes the pro-life amendment favored by [his opponent] and favors leaving up to a woman and her doctor the

abortion question.”

This indicated Bush had once been on the side of abortion-rights advocates. But sometime after the 1978 campaign (in which he won the Republican primary but lost the general election), he reversed his position. During his successful 1994 campaign for governor, Bush said, “I will do everything in my power to restrict abortions.” And as a presidential candidate, he was calling himself “pro-life” and supporting a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion. Yet his switch from “pro-choice” to “pro-life” had escaped public notice.

During the fight for the Democratic presidential nomination, Vice President Al Gore, who was campaigning as a champion of choice, took a big hit when news accounts revealed he had cast anti-abortion votes and expressed anti-abortion sentiments in the 1970s and 1980s. Bush’s campaign had derided Gore for pulling a 180. “I think people want to see consistency with their leaders,” said Minda Tucker, a Bush spokesperson. Had Bush, too, shifted his abortion position in a direction more in line with his party’s faithful?

When I asked the Bush campaign about the 1978 article, spokesman Dan Bartlett said, “We consider this a misinterpretation. He is pro-life. He was always opposed to abortion.” You’re saying, remarked, that the reporter got it wrong? “We’re saying this is a misinterpretation,” he repeated.

The campaign had resorted to common subterfuge: claim the candidate was misquoted. There was no foundation for its assertion that Sylvia Teague had incorrectly recounted her interview with Bush. And Teague had gone on to become an award-winning investigative journalist at KCBS-TV in Los Angeles. She told me she was confident her story had been accurate. She did not recall Bush or his congressional campaign complaining she had misstated his position. Most campaigns would scream at a newspaper so thoroughly mangled the views of a candidate on such a sensitive issue.

The Bush campaign’s “misinterpretation” explanation did not withstand close examination. In the context of the article, the disputed sentence made perfect sense. Bush had been contrasting himself with his Republican primary opponent, a Reagan-like conservative. First Bush noted his own conservative views, then he pointed out that he differed with his foe on abortion. But here was the killer: after saying, in Teague’s account, that abortion should be a matter between a woman and her doctor, Bush added, “That does not mean I’m for abortion.” Why would Bush have had to say those words if he had told Teague he was *opposed* to abortion rights?

Which scenario was more likely? A reporter with a good reputation reported the exact opposite of what a candidate said to her about abortion? Or a politician blurted out what he really thought, later reversed his position on a contentious issue to be more in tune with the activists of his party, and then lied about the switch? Yet by denying any abortion about-face had transpired, Bush evaded confrontation with what would have been a highly uncomfortable truth. *1

“I did the duty necessary. . . . Any allegations other than that are simply not true.”

In one of the more important ruses of his campaign, Bush misrepresented his military service and the offered dubious explanations in response to questions about it. His goal was to create the perception he had served honorably and legitimately in the National Guard during the Vietnam War, when the record suggested otherwise.

Soon after he entered the presidential race, the Associated Press discovered that Bush had not been honest about his military past when he had campaigned unsuccessfully for Congress in 1978. Bush then, in an ad in the *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, he boasted he had served “in the U.S. Air Force and the Texas Air National Guard where he piloted the F-102 aircraft.” But Bush had done time only in the Guard, not the Air Force. When AP asked Bush’s presidential campaign about this, the Bush crew could have taken the opportunity to set the record straight. Instead, Bush spokeswoman Karen Hughes told AP that the advertisement had been “accurate,” considering the time Bush had spent on alert and in training. “As an officer,” she maintained, “he was serving on active duty in the Air Force.” Bush himself remarked, “I was in the Air Force for over 600 days.” Not so, according to a definitive source—the Air Force. The AP reported that “the Air Force says that Air National Guard members are considered ‘guardsmen on active duty’ while receiving pilot training. They are not, however, counted as members of the overall active-duty Air Force. . . . Anyone in the Air National Guard is always considered a guardsman and not a member of the active-duty Air Force.” The 1978 ad had been a distortion, and Bush and Hughes refused to concede that.

Bush’s two-decades-old exaggeration of his Vietnam-era service—which received scant media notice—was not his sole problem on this front. Prior to becoming an official 2000 contender, he had been dogged by questions concerning his reason for joining the Guard and his good fortune in snagging a spot, which protected him from being drafted for Vietnam. And his answers—before and during the 2000 campaign—often had a less-than-truthful, tinny sound.

Bush had long denied that anyone rigged the system for him when he joined the Air National Guard in 1968. At that time, he was finishing his final semester at Yale (and losing his student deferment) and the Vietnam War was escalating. The National Guard was widely viewed as a way to escape being drafted. Naturally, Guard slots were prized by young men answering the call of self-preservation. Parents in Texas Guard officials have said that at that time there were long waiting lists. And connections helped. In Houston, so many sons of prominent families were joining the 147th Fighter Group of the Texas Air National Guard that the group would later be dubbed the Champagne Unit, according to Bill Minutaglio’s biography of Bush, *First Son*. That was the fighter wing Bush entered. And he said he did so without the help of his father, then a congressman, or any other person of clout. In March 1999, *The Boston Globe* quoted him: “Did I receive preferential treatment? There were some pilot slots available, and I was chosen. I sought and was chosen.”

Yet on September 26, 1999, Ben Barnes, a former Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives, revealed to the *New York Times* that during the Vietnam War he often received requests to help men find a way into the National Guard. One such entreaty, he said, had come in for Bush. A Houston oilman named Sidney Adger, a friend of Bush’s father, had asked Barnes to pull strings for George W. According to Barnes, he then contacted the brigadier general in charge of the state’s Air National Guard. What happened after that? Barnes wouldn’t say. And the general and Adger were dead.

Perhaps Bush hadn’t known about any behind-the-scenes favoritism. He now told reporters that

someone had exerted influence on his behalf, they had not informed him (and he added that his father the-congressman had done nothing). It might have been that the Air National Guard itself had decided without prompting, that it wouldn't hurt to do a favor for the son of a congressman. No preferential treatment, as Bush repeatedly said? Maybe it was in the eye of the beholder, and this beholder hadn't seen it. But other Bush statements about this chapter in his life were much more subject to dispute.

Why had he sought a Guard slot? Had it been to elude the draft? "At the time I wanted to fight . . . and I was willing to train for whatever experience came my way," he said in March 1999. But in 1994 he had explained his rationale differently, telling *USA Today*, "I wanted to be a pilot. I heard there were pilot slots open in units in Houston. I joined." In 1994, according to *The Texas Monthly*, when asked if he had turned toward the Guard to avoid Vietnam, Bush responded, "Hell no. Do you think I'm going to admit that?" But in 1990, according to a *Houston Chronicle* story published in 1999, Bush said, "I was not prepared to shoot my eardrum out with a shotgun in order to get a deferment. Nor was I willing to go to Canada. So I chose to better myself by learning how to fly airplanes." The explanation sure sounded like the words of someone who had been primarily concerned with evading the draft, not a person who had "wanted to fight." Moreover, when Bush entered the Guard, he had to say on his application papers whether he was willing to volunteer for overseas duty. He checked the box that read "do not volunteer." In a 1999 interview with the *Washington Post*, Bush claimed he did not recall doing so. Two weeks later, his campaign released a statement from a former Air National Guard officer who said Bush "probably" had been advised by Guard officers not to volunteer for an overseas assignment.

The stories that came out in mid-1999 about Bush's Guard service—which focused on how he had managed to enlist—were speedbumps, not potholes, for his campaign. But a page-one report published by the *Boston Globe* in May 2000 added a new and more disturbing layer of mystery to Bush's military history, and it offered more evidence that Bush had been knowingly dishonest about his time as a guardsman.

In Bush's campaign autobiography, *A Charge to Keep*, he wrote that he had completed his pilot training in 1970 and "continued flying with my unit for the next several years." But according to copies of his military records obtained by the *Globe*, Bush stopped flying during his final 18 months of service in 1972 and 1973. More curious, the records indicated Bush had not reported for his Guard duty during a long stretch of that time. That raised a question that could cause Bush much trouble: Had a man who now wanted to be commander-in-chief gone AWOL when he served in the Guard?

In May of 1972—with two years to go on his six-year commitment to the Guard—Bush moved to Alabama to work on the Senate campaign of a family friend. He asked the Guard for permission to do "equivalent training" at a unit there, and he won approval to join temporarily a unit at Maxwell Air Force Base. But that unit had no airplanes, no pilots. It could not provide the training that Bush, who had done well as a fighter jet pilot in Houston, needed. Albert Lloyd Jr., the Texas Air Guard personnel director at the time, told the *Globe* that he was mystified by the 1972 decision to allow Bush to pull duty in such a unit. (No preferential treatment?) But the Air Reserve Personnel Center in Denver, according to an investigation published by TomPaine.com, ultimately disallowed the transfer. And for months, Bush put in no Guard time. In the meantime, he lost his flight status for failing to submit to an annual physical examination. (Bush campaign aides, trying to explain the point, said Bush did not take a physical because he was in Alabama and his personal doctor was . . .

Houston. But, as the *Globe* noted, “Flight physicals can be administered only by certified Air Force flight surgeons, and some were assigned at the time to Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, where Bush was living.”) For failing to take a physical, Bush was grounded. In September 1972, he asked to do duty at a unit in Montgomery; permission was granted.

The tale at this point becomes odder. The commander of the Montgomery unit and his administrative officer, in interviews with the *Globe*, said they had no recollection of Bush ever reporting. Lloyd noted that if Bush had performed duty in Alabama, “his drill attendance should have been certified and sent to Ellington [Air Force Base in Houston], and there would have been a record. We cannot find the records to show he fulfilled the requirements in Alabama.” Odder still, when Bush went back to Texas after the November election, he apparently did not return to his unit at Ellington. His annual performance report, dated May 2, 1973, noted, “Lt. Bush has not been observed at the unit” for the past year. The unit’s administrative officer at the time later said he believed Bush had been in Alabama for the entire year—which had not been the case. In May, June, and July 1973, Bush pulled 36 days of duty at Ellington—a large amount of time in a short period—before receiving permission to end his service early. He was off to Massachusetts to attend Harvard Business School.

So where was W? Did he skip out on the Guard in Alabama? Did he abandon his Houston unit in late 1972 and the first four months of 1973? Bush wouldn’t talk to the *Globe*. But campaign spokesman Dan Bartlett said Bush recalled doing duty in Alabama and “coming back to Houston and doing duty, though he does not recall if it was on a consistent basis.” Once the story broke, Bush said, “I did the duty necessary. . . . Any allegations other than that are simply not true.” At a June 23, 2000 press conference in Alabama, a reporter asked if Bush recalled what work he had done in the Alabama Guard. “No, I really don’t,” he replied. “But I was there.” Two days later, Bush’s campaign acknowledged that it had failed to find any documents proving he fulfilled his duty in Alabama. (The campaign later located one undated document without Bush’s name that it maintained showed Bush had put in one day’s duty with the Montgomery unit. But that record was not conclusive, and, if accurate, could also mean that Bush had gone weeks without reporting.)

Bartlett told reporters that campaign inquiries would turn up former Guard members who could corroborate Bush’s presence in Alabama. Yet the campaign produced no such witnesses. (The Montgomery unit had contained 600 to 700 people.) And Bush provided not one name of a former comrade in Alabama. He did point to an ex-girlfriend as a witness. But *The New Republic* reported that she said she remembered Bush telling her he was obliged to perform duty in Alabama, not that she knew for sure he had.

Bush’s military service was not as he had portrayed it in his autobiography. And it was further evidence he did not honor his vows. When he enlisted with the Texas Air Guard, he signed a pledge: “I, George Walker Bush, upon successful completion of pilot training plan to return to my unit and fulfill my obligation to the utmost of my ability. I have applied for pilot training with the goal of making flying a lifetime pursuit and I believe I can best accomplish this to my own satisfaction by service as a member of the Air National Guard as long as possible.” Bush did not serve “as long as possible.” He received pilot training—at the expense of the U.S. government—and then cut out on his unit, heading to Alabama where, at the least, he did not put his training to any use. He failed to arrange for a flight physical (so as to be fully ready to serve), and, once back in Texas, he flew no more for the Guard. He then ended his service prematurely. Bush had not been faithful to the Guard, and on the

campaign trail, he refused to be honest about that.

“Trust me. If there was a time bomb sitting out there, it would have been discovered by the Clintons in 1992.”

Along with his iffy military record, there was another embarrassing episode in Bush’s past—this one involving unlawful behavior—that he had managed to keep secret prior to the campaign. But when it was exposed, he would again employ guile in a blatant (and somewhat ridiculous) attempt to escape what appeared to be a lie previously told.

For years, Bush had acknowledged his tendency to drink too much before he cast off the booze when he turned 40, which was about the time he became a born-again Christian. But he adamantly refused to explain the particulars. Had his drinking been a serious problem? He wouldn’t answer that. Unlike other politicians of his generation, he declined to say whether he had used marijuana. As he put it when campaigning for governor in 1994, according to the *Texarkana Gazette*, “What I did as a kid? I don’t think it’s relevant. . . . Did I behave irresponsibly as a kid at times? Sure did. You bet.” His definition of *kid* seemed a bit liberal.

Concerning his more wild days, Bush adopted a best-defense-is-a-good-offense stance. He branded any questioning of his personal past illegitimate rumor-mongering. He equated being asked about the booze-and-drugs issue with being targeted by unfair innuendo. “I’m not ready for rumors and gossip,” Bush told *USA Today*. “I’m ready for the truth. Surely people will learn the truth.” What insincerity! He was claiming he wanted people to know the truth about him, but he would not answer a whole slew of questions about his past.

One concealed truth Bush had not been “ready for” exploded on November 2, 2000, five days before Election Day. A Maine television channel reported that in 1976, Bush, then 30 years old, was arrested in Kennebunkport, Maine, for drunken driving. He had admitted to the arresting officer he had been drinking. He paid a \$150 fine and had his driving privileges revoked in Maine. After the story broke at a campaign press conference (his first in a month), candidate Bush acknowledged the report was accurate, and he said that he had never publicly revealed the DWI conviction out of concern he would set a bad example for his twin girls. In the same press conference, Bush maintained, “I have been very candid about my past.” This was obviously not a factual statement, since Bush had neglected to disclose this arrest while supposedly being “very candid about his past.”

As the story developed, the issue became not his post-youth crime, but one question: Had Bush lied to keep his arrest record a secret? Wayne Slater, a reporter for the *Dallas Morning News* and longtime Bush watcher, recalled he had asked Bush in a 1998 interview whether Bush had ever been arrested after 1968. Slater told his media colleagues on the Bush campaign plane that Bush had said no. Slater also remembered that later in that 1998 interview Bush indicated he was about to return to this subject. But as Bush began to say something, Karen Hughes cut in, and Bush said nothing else on the topic.

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