

# **CLAIM vs. FACT: The President on Meet the Press**

**February 8, 2004**



## **Statement of John Podesta, President and CEO, Center for American Progress**

*"President Bush wouldn't have agreed to an hour long network interview without a good reason and today he had one: in the span of a week he's faced the dual challenges of a loss of credibility on the war in Iraq and his management of the economy.*

*"His statement this morning that he would cut the deficit in half is simply laughable. Analyses by independent organizations like Goldman Sachs, the Concord Coalition, the Committee for Economic Development, and Decision Economics all project deficits of about \$5 trillion over the next decade, even assuming a return to strong growth."*

*"The President's statement that there is 'good momentum' on the job creation front is dishonest: while we are averaging 72,000 new private sector jobs created per month, at that pace, it would not be until May 2007 that this President would have created his first net job. President Bush is well on his way to having the worst job creation record since the Great Depression. His bragging today only served to reinforce his lack of credibility on managing the nation's economy.*

*"And what the President referred to as a "word contest" regarding the threat from Iraq is, in fact, his attempt to change the rationale for going to war and rewrite the history of what has occurred. His argument today that Iraq had the capacity to make weapons of mass destruction and pass them into the hands of shadowy terrorist networks is inconsistent with the intelligence provided to him.*

*President Bush sought to restore his credibility today and he clearly failed to do so."*

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# **CLAIM vs. FACT: Pre-War Assertions**

## **PRE-WAR INTELLIGENCE HYPE**

- **CLAIM:** "I expected to find the weapons [because] I based my decision on the best intelligence possible...The evidence I had was the best possible evidence that he had a weapon."
- **FACT - WHITE HOUSE REPEATEDLY WARNED BY INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY:** The Washington Post reported this weekend, "President Bush and his top advisers ignored many of the caveats and qualifiers included in the classified report on Saddam Hussein's weapons." Specifically, the President made unequivocal statements that Iraq "has got chemical weapons" two months after the DIA concluded that there was "no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons." He said, "Iraq has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes suitable for nuclear weapons production" three months after the White House received an intelligence report that clearly indicated Department of Energy experts concluded the tubes were not intended to produce uranium enrichment centrifuges. He said, "Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa," three months after "the CIA sent two memos to the White House in October voicing strong doubts about" the claim. [Sources: WP, [2/7/04](#); Bush statement, [11/3/02](#); DIA report, [2002](#); Bush statement, [1/28/03](#); NIE, [October 2002](#); WP, [7/23/03](#); Bush statement, [10/7/02](#); WP, [9/26/03](#)]

## **IGNORING INTELLIGENCE**

- **CLAIM:** "We looked at the intelligence."
- **FACT – WHITE HOUSE IGNORED INTELLIGENCE WARNINGS:** Knight Ridder reported that CIA officers "said President Bush ignored warnings" that his WMD case was weak. And Greg Thielmann, the Bush State Department's top intelligence official, "said suspicions were presented as fact, and contrary arguments ignored." Knight Ridder later reported, "Senior diplomatic, intelligence and military officials have charged that Bush and his top aides made assertions about Iraq's banned weapons programs and alleged links to al-Qaeda that weren't supported by credible intelligence, and that they ignored intelligence that didn't support their policies." [Knight-Ridder, [6/13/03](#); CBS News, [6/7/03](#); Knight Ridder, [6/28/03](#)]

## **IGNORING INTERNATIONAL INTELLIGENCE WARNINGS**

- **CLAIM:** "The international community thought he had weapons."
- **FACT – INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TOLD WHITE HOUSE THE OPPOSITE:** The IAEA and U.N. both repeatedly told the Administration it had no evidence that Iraq possessed WMD. On 2/15/03, the IAEA said that, "We have to date found no evidence of ongoing prohibited nuclear or nuclear-related activities in Iraq." On 3/7/03 IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei said nuclear experts have found "no indication" that Iraq has tried to import high-strength aluminum tubes for centrifuge enrichment of uranium. At the same time, AP reported that "U.N. weapons inspectors have not found any 'smoking guns' in Iraq during their search for weapons WMD." AP also reported, "U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix said his teams have not uncovered any WMD." [Source: WP, [2/15/03](#); NY Times, [3/7/03](#); AP, [1/9/03](#); AP, [2/14/03](#)]

## **INFORMING CONGRESS OF INTELLIGENCE CAVEATS**

- **CLAIM:** "I went to Congress with the same intelligence. Congress saw the same intelligence I had, and they looked at exactly what I looked at."
- **FACT – CONGRESS WAS OUTRAGED AT PRESENTATION BY THE WHITE HOUSE:** The New Republic reported, "Senators were outraged to find that intelligence info given to them omitted the qualifications and countervailing evidence that had characterized the classified version and played up the claims that strengthened the administration's case for war." According to Rep. Paul Kanjorski (D-PA), many House members were only convinced to support the war after the Administration "showed them a photograph of a small, unmanned airplane spraying a liquid in what appeared to be a test for delivering chemical and biological agents," despite the U.S. Air Force telling the Administration it "sharply disputed the notion that Iraq's UAVs were being designed as attack weapons." [Source: The New Republic, [6/30/03](#); Wilkes Barre Times Leader, [1/6/04](#); WP, [9/26/03](#)]

# **CLAIM vs. FACT: Pre-War Assertions (Continued)**

## **PRE-WAR "IMMINENT THREAT" ASSERTION**

- **CLAIM:** "I believe it is essential that when we see a threat, we deal with those threats before they become imminent. It's too late if they become imminent."
- **FACT – ADMINISTRATION REPEATEDLY CLAIMED IRAQ WAS AN "IMMINENT THREAT":** The Bush Administration repeatedly claimed that Iraq was an imminent threat before the war – not that it would "become imminent." Specifically, White House communications director Dan Bartlett was asked on CNN: "Is [Saddam Hussein] an imminent threat to US interests, either in that part of the world or to Americans right here at home?" Bartlett replied, "Well, of course he is." Similarly, when White House spokesman Ari Fleischer was asked whether America went to war in Iraq because of an imminent threat, he replied, "Absolutely." And White House spokesman Scott McClellan said the reason NATO allies – including the U.S. - should support the defense of one of its members from Iraq was because "this is about an imminent threat." Additionally, the Administration used "immediate," "urgent" and "mortal" to describe the Iraq threat to the United States. [Source: American Progress list, [1/29/04](#)]

## **BUSH'S THREAT RHETORIC BEFORE THE WAR**

- **CLAIM:** "I think, if I might remind you that in my language I called it a grave and gathering threat, but I don't want to get into word contests."
- **FACT – BUSH MADE FAR MORE DIRE STATEMENTS BEFORE THE WAR:** While the President did call Iraq a "grave and gathering" threat, that was not all he said. On 11/23/02, he said Iraq posed a "unique and urgent threat." On 1/3/03 he said "Iraq is a threat to any American." On 10/28/02 he said Iraq was "a real and dangerous threat" to America. On 10/2/02 he said, "The Iraqi regime is a threat of unique urgency" and that Iraq posed "a grave threat" to America. [Bush, [11/23/02](#); Bush, [1/3/03](#); Bush, [10/28/02](#); Bush, [10/2/02](#); Bush, [10/2/02](#)]

## **SADDAM-AL QAEDA-WMD CONNECTION**

- **CLAIM:** "Iraq had the capacity to make a weapon and then let that weapon fall into the hands of a shadowy terrorist network."
- **FACT – ASSERTION BELIES PREVIOUS INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS:** This assertion belies the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate which told the White House that Iraq would most likely only coordinate with Al Qaeda if the U.S. invaded Iraq. As the NYT reported, "[A] CIA assessment said last October: 'Baghdad for now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks' in the United States." The CIA added that Saddam might order attacks with WMD as 'his last chance to exact vengeance by taking a large number of victims with him.'" Previously, the CIA had told the White House that Iraq "has not provided chemical or biological weapons to Al Qaeda or related terrorist groups." And David Kay himself said, "I found no real connection between WMD and terrorists" in Iraq. [Source: NIE, [2002](#); NY Times, [1/29/03](#); NY Times, [2/6/02](#); NBC News, [1/26/04](#)]

## **DAVID KAY'S REPORT**

- **CLAIM:** "And when David Kay goes in and says we haven't found stockpiles yet, and there's theories as to where the weapons went. They could have been destroyed during the war. Saddam and his henchmen could have destroyed them as we entered into Iraq. They could be hidden. They could have been transported to another country, and we'll find out."
- **FACT – KAY ACTUALLY SAID WMD HAD BEEN DESTROYED AFTER 1991:** David Kay didn't say we haven't found the stockpiles of chemical weapons because they are destroyed, hidden or transported to another country. Kay said that they were never produced and hadn't been produced since 1991. As he said, "Multiple sources with varied access and reliability have told ISG that Iraq did not have a large, ongoing, centrally controlled CW program after 1991. Information found to date suggests that Iraq's large-scale capability to develop, produce and fill new CW munitions was reduced - if not entirely destroyed - during Operations Desert Storm and Desert Fox, 13 years of U.N. sanctions and U.N. inspections." [Kay Testimony, [2004](#)]

# **CLAIM vs. FACT: Investigative Commissions**

## **WMD COMMISSION**

- **CLAIM:** "The reason why we gave it time is because we didn't want it to be hurried... it's important that this investigation take its time."
- **FACT – OTHER COMMISSIONS SHOW THAT THE REPORT IS BEING DELAYED FOR POLITICS:** Regardless of upcoming Parliamentary elections, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has set up a similar commission to investigate intelligence that will report by July. Additionally, in 1983 after the terrorist attack on U.S. troops in Beirut, a commission was appointed and completed its report within 2 months.

## **9/11 COMMISSION**

- **CLAIM:** "We have given extraordinary cooperation with Chairmen Kean and Hamilton."
- **FACT – WHITE HOUSE HAS STONEWALLED THE 9/11 COMMISSION:** According to the Baltimore Sun, President Bush "opposed the outside inquiry" into September 11<sup>th</sup>. When Congress forced him to relent, Time Magazine reported he tried to choke its funding, noting, "the White House brushed off a request quietly made by 9-11 Commission Chairman Tom Kean" for adequate funding. Then, the NY Times reported, "President Bush declined to commit the White House to turning over highly classified intelligence reports to the independent federal commission investigating the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, despite public threats of a subpoena from the bipartisan panel." And as the Akron Beacon Journal reported last week, "the 9/11 panel did not receive the speedy cooperation it expected. In a preliminary report last summer, the panel's co-chairmen, Thomas Kean, a Republican and former governor of New Jersey, and Lee Hamilton, a Democrat and former congressman from Indiana, complained about lengthy delays in gaining access to critical documents, federal employees and administration officials. They warned the lack of cooperation would prove damaging, ensuring that a full investigation would take that much longer to complete, if at all." [Source: Baltimore Sun, 6/14/02; Time Magazine, [3/26/03](#); NY Times, [10/27/03](#); Akron Beacon Journal 2/2/04]

# **CLAIM vs. FACT: Economy/Budgetary Priorities**

## **UNEMPLOYMENT**

- **CLAIM:** "How about the fact that we are now increasing jobs or the fact that unemployment is now down to 5.6 percent? There was a winter recession and unemployment went up, and now it's heading in the right direction."
- **FACT – THE JOB MARKET CONTINUES TO STAGNATE:** Since President Bush's first tax cut in March 2001, the economy has shed more than 2 million jobs. He will be the first president since Herbert Hoover to end his term with a net job loss record. Additionally, the White House Counsel of Economic Advisors pledged that the President's "jobs and growth" package would create 1,836,000 new jobs by the end of 2003 as part of its pledge to create 5.5 million new jobs by 2004. But the economy added 221,000 jobs since the last tax cut went into effect, meaning the White House has fallen 1,615,000 jobs short of their mark. [Source: EPI, [2/4/2003](#); [Jobwatch.org](#)]

## **JOB CREATION**

- **CLAIM:** "There is good momentum when it comes to the creation of new jobs."
- **FACT – STATISTICS SHOW THERE IS NOT GOOD JOB MOMENTUM:** In the last two months we've seen an average of 73,000 private sector jobs created. At this pace, we wouldn't see a new net job created until May 2007. Even beyond the recession and 9/11, just looking at the recovery since November 2001, the current pace of job growth puts us on track to have the worst jobs recovery since the Great Depression.

## **TAXES**

- **CLAIM:** "But what the people must understand is that instead of wondering what to do, I acted, and I acted by cutting the taxes on individuals and small businesses, primarily. And that, itself, has led to this recovery."
- **FACT – BUSH TAX CUTS HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS** The Bush tax cuts had little effect on small business owners. Under the first tax cut, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports, small business owners "would be far more likely to receive no tax reduction whatsoever from the Administration's tax package than to benefit" because only 3.7% of small business owners are affected by the top tax rate cuts that were the bulk of the plan. Under the 2003 tax cut, the Urban Institute-Brookings Tax Policy Center estimates "nearly four out of every five tax filers (79%) with small business income would receive less than the amount" while "52% of people with small business returns would get \$500 or less." [Source: CBPP, [5/3/01](#); CBPP, [1/21/03](#)]

## **DEFICIT**

- **CLAIM:** "The budget I just proposed to the Congress cuts the deficit in half in five years."
- **FACT – WHITE HOUSE ESTIMATES OMIT INEVITABLE COSTS:** The President's proposal to cut the deficit in half deliberately "omits a number of likely costs" such as the continued cost of Iraq and its own defense spending plans. All told, he is proposing roughly \$3 trillion in new tax cuts and spending, including \$1 trillion to make his tax cuts permanent, \$70 billion for the Alternative Minimum Tax, and \$50 billion more for war in Iraq. The result is that the deficit is predicted to be "in the range of \$500 billion in 2009" – not even near half of what it currently is. [Source: CBPP, [1/16/04](#); Washington Times, [1/20/04](#); Reuters, [2/2/04](#)]

## **STIMULUS**

- **CLAIM:** "The economic stimulus plan that I passed is making a big difference."
- **FACT – STUDY SHOWS TAX CUTS BARELY MADE A DENT:** A study by Economy.com attributes only 0.9 percent out of the total 7.2 percent annualized growth in the third quarter to the 2003 tax cut. In other words, the Economy.com analysis suggests that the strength of the economy in the third quarter was not due primarily to the tax cut: Without the tax cut, growth would have still been an impressive 6.3 percent. [Peter Orszag in the New Republic, [11/6/03](#)]

# **CLAIM vs. FACT: Personal Military Records**

## **RELEASE OF RECORDS**

- **CLAIM:** Russert – “Would you authorize the release of everything to settle this?” Bush – “Yes, absolutely. We did so in 2000 by the way.”
- **FACT – RECORDS OFF-LIMITS:** “[A]s Bush has risen in public life over the last several years, Texas military officials have put many of his records off-limits and heavily redacted many other pages.” [Source: Boston Globe, [5/23/2000](#)]

## **REPORTING FOR DUTY**

- **CLAIM:** “I did show up in Alabama.”
- **FACT – UNIT COMMANDER DOESN'T BELIEVE HE SHOWED UP FOR DUTY:** The Boston Globe reports that Bush’s assigned unit commander, William Turnipseed, and his administrative officer, Kenneth K. Lott, do not believe that Bush reported. In an interview Turnipseed said, “Had he reported in, I would have had some recall, and I do not. I had been in Texas, done my flight training there. If we had had a first lieutenant from Texas, I would have remembered.” [Source: Boston Globe, [5/23/2000](#)]