

Why Do Politicians Lie?

By Roger Koopman

We've all heard the quip, "how do you know when a politician is lying?"

Answer: His lips are moving.

But there's another obvious question that begs an obvious answer. WHY do politicians lie?

Answer: Because they can.

The American media – or what could once be legitimately called the media – draws our attention every day to the lies they have caught their least-favored politicians saying. Often they are incredibly blatant. The furrowed brows on the left (CNN, MSNBC and the major networks), were almost gleeful when they could trip up Trump in a self-serving fib. Carlson, Hannity and other featured fellows on FOX News hold forth with an unending stream of reported fabrications and falsehoods, readily provided by a desperate president and his administration of race-baiters and pointy-headed socialists.

Here's the rub. Almost all the politicians' lies, left and right, have been accurately identified by these outfits. We should be shocked. We should be outraged. But we forget about them in an hour or a day, numbed by the sheer volume of fibbery that enters our weary brains. We figure, eh. They're politicians. What more can we expect? Our office holders protect themselves in a blanket of citizen cynicism that they themselves have woven. The blanket remains intact because our standards are so very low.

We better think about this very carefully. Just how accepting of practiced, self-aggrandizing lying have we become – and what does it mean to the very soul of our country? Does truth – and truthful communication – really matter in this day and age?

Maybe Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson answered that question best in a May '21 interview. *"Whatever happens from telling the truth, it's the best thing that can happen. It doesn't really matter how it looks to you at the moment, or even across the years. It's an article of faith in some sense."*

Peterson added this. *"You know, our culture is predicated on the idea that truth in speech is of Divine significance. It's the fundamental presupposition of our culture. If you believe that, then you act it out, and you take the consequences. You're going to take the consequences one way or another you know. So you want the truth on your side? Or do you want to hide behind falsehoods?"*

One thing seems clear to me. You cannot build trusting relationships on the basis of false communication. That's equally true in friendships, in marriage, in business or in politics. It seems to me, when people communicate, there is a certain "covenant" relationship that exists, based on the assumption that the other person is telling you something that, to the best of their knowledge, is true.

It is more than bad faith when you intentionally break that covenant. Lying violates the other person, and violates their rights. It's morally and ethically equivalent to theft. When you fill a person's mind with falsehood -- replacing the truth with a lie -- you are literally stealing from them. It is far worse than being held up at gunpoint by a road agent who takes your wallet. At least then, you know that a theft has just occurred. But when a person who you trust to be telling you the truth is in fact telling you lies, they are taking advantage of your trust and leaving you defenseless.

Why do politicians lie? Partly because we are drawn to lies. We love to have our ears tickled and we love to believe gossip. Secondly, because in the political world, lying works. How does the saying go? "A lie travels half way around the world before truth has put its pants on." This is true even when we know, intuitively that we were just lied to.

Yet tolerating habitual lying by your favorite politicians is identical to participating in it. Complain not when your moral blindness leads to you getting the very government you deserve.

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