

## Past Recipients of the NCTE Doublespeak Award

### 2020

To the phrase "**China Virus**" and those who use it. We understand doublespeak to be a purposeful choice of words that represents "language designed not to lead but mislead" and that seeks to "distort reality" (NCTE's Public Language Awards history document, p.25). In 2020, the world has been dealing with a global pandemic and attempting to curb the spread of COVID-19, a disease caused by a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). We nominate for this award any elected official and news media personnel who used, defended, and/or advocated for the use of phrases such as *Chinese Virus*, *China Virus*, *the Chinese Flu*, *Kung Flu*, and *Wuhan Flu* in place of the virus' official name. These phrases have been purposefully repeated as a means to distract and mislead the public. The use of these phrases is designed to deflect attention away from the American government's initial decision to downplay the seriousness of the virus' spread and reassign blame to China. In scapegoating China, the American government alleviates itself of responsibility. Worse, this language is racist and hateful and has fueled anti-Chinese and anti-Asian sentiments across the US. As [Jérôme Viala-Gaudefroy](#) and Dana Lindaman wrote on the blogging site, *The Conversation*:

Personification is metaphorical: its purpose is to help understand something unfamiliar and abstract (i.e. the virus) by using terms that are familiar and embodied (i.e. a location, a nationality or a person). But as cognitive linguists [George Lakoff and Mark Johnson](#) have long shown, metaphors are not just poetic tools, they are used constantly and shape our world view. The adjective "Chinese" is particularly problematic as it associates the infection with an ethnicity. Talking about group identities with [an explicitly medical language](#) is a recognized process of [Othering](#) ([here](#) and [here](#)), historically used in [anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy, including toward Chinese immigrants in North America](#). This type of language stokes anxiety, resentment, fear and disgust toward people associated with that group.

While elected officials and news media personnel who choose to use, defend, and/or advocate for the use of this language may argue that they are seeking clarity and accuracy in public discourse by stating that the virus comes from China, this, too, is a distraction, a distortion, and a political tact intended to stoke existing xenophobic fears. This intentional use of language is divisive and xenophobic. It is not merely a statement about the virus' origin.

### 2019

To Donald Trump, President of the United States, for perpetuating language that is grossly deceptive, evasive, euphemistic, confusing, and self-centered. CNN Legal Analyst Paul Callen, in his essay "[To understand Trump's Ukraine call, you gotta know the secret code](#)," explains that Trump uses "coded" language to create deniability for himself. Callen analyzes Trump's July 25, 2019, phone call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, noting that Trump's slippery language allows him to imply a quid pro quo-- and then deny it.

### 2018

To **Rudy Giuliani**, Attorney to the President of the United States and former Mayor of New York City, for his "truth isn't truth" statement. He explained that his statement "was not meant as a pontification on moral theology but one referring to the situation of two people making precisely contradictory statements, the classic 'he said, she said' puzzle. Sometimes further inquiry can reveal the truth, other times it doesn't."

### 2017

To **Kellyanne Conway**, Counselor to the President of the United States, for coining the term "alternative facts" to defend President Trump's falsehoods about inauguration crowd sizes. This is a marquee example of Conway's commitment to spinning untruths into rhetorical rallying cries. This phrase meets all descriptors of the Doublespeak Award for "perpetuating language that is grossly deceptive, evasive, euphemistic, confusing, or self-centered."

### 2016

**Donald Trump, American business man, television producer and politician. Republican Party nominee for President of the United States in the 2016 election.**

Numerous organizations, from news media outlets to public interest groups, have documented the plethora of statements attributed to Donald Trump in his pursuit of the presidency of the United States. Trump repeatedly fails to communicate how the greater community would benefit from his proposals and instead often tends toward obfuscation and inconsistency. Many times he has made a statement one day and denied it in following days. Trump has the unique gift of capitalizing on what he labels the dishonesty of his opponent, all while spinning unsubstantiated claims of his own. In literary terms, Donald Trump might be viewed as an inconsistent or otherwise unreliable narrator. In rhetorical terms, he frequently honors pathos before logos, often speaking without substance and placing feelings above rationality. One committee member wrote, "I don't think we've ever had a better example of the Doublespeak Award," and the five committee members unanimously voted Donald Trump as the champion of the dubious Doublespeak honor.

**2015**

**Senator Joni Ernst, United States Senator for Iowa**

For referring to the Keystone XL Pipeline with the euphemism "Keystone Jobs Bill" during her response to President Obama's State of the Union Address. Her remarks favorably perpetuate the belief that this bill is primarily a jobs bill, which is a definite case of word-smithing. It is disingenuous of Joni Ernst to insist that this is the sole purpose of the Keystone XL Pipeline without making any attempt to acknowledge the counter narratives and complexities involved in the issue, namely the profit boon for the oil industry and the influence of that industry in lobbying heavily for the legislation.

**2014**

**No winner announced.**

**2013**

**Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel**

For his "reform" rhetoric in his management of the Chicago public schools, in particular his plan to close over 50 schools for "underutilization" of space. As described in the Washington Post:

Emanuel plans to close 54 public elementary schools at the end of the 2012-13 school year. The reason, he says, is because the schools are "underutilized." He bases that claim on an esoteric — and deeply flawed — Chicago Public Schools space utilization formula. It's a formula, for example, that will peg a school's utilization as "efficient" (rather than "overcrowded") if that school has 36 students in each of its "allotted homerooms." Using that same formula, a CPS elementary school with just 23 kids in each of its "allotted homerooms" would find itself on the district's "underutilized" list, which, in 2013, is the first step on the road to being shut down.

The article goes on to note that "At the mayor's kids' school, however, elementary classes are considered 'full' if there are 23 students in the classroom." The mayor's children attend the private University of Chicago Lab School, once attended by the mayor's pal Arne Duncan. In the public schools, however, as the mayor's Communications Officer Becky Carroll stated, "It's the quality of teaching in that classroom. You could have a teacher that is high-quality that could take 40 kids in a class and help them succeed." No problem, as long as it's somebody else's kids in jam-packed classes in deteriorating, if well "utilized," classrooms. Mayor Emanuel surely deserves this prestigious award for his embodiment of Orwell's vision of a rhetorically fraudulent society.

**2012**

**American Petroleum Institute**

For their public statements regarding regulation. On April 24, 2012, API's Chief Economist John Felmy told reporters this morning that when America's oil and natural gas industry reports solid earnings it means jobs are being created and more revenue is being delivered to government. He said raising taxes on the industry would hurt both jobs and revenue. "Unfortunately, calls for higher taxes on the industry often accompany the release of earnings reports. Higher taxes are a bad idea, not only because they would be discriminatory and punitive – but also because they would hurt investment, hurt jobs, hurt future financial performance and, after a few years, decrease the revenue our industry delivers to the government." Clearly, the API is not telling us the whole story. What are the damages to the environment? What are all the factors that affect how much the consumer pays for gas and oil? Finally,

the experts who are making these public press announcements are serving their own interests and not the interests of the public or consumers.

## 2011

### **Cherokee Principal Chief Chad Smith**

Since the Doublespeak Award is an ironic tribute to public speakers who have perpetuated language that is grossly deceptive, evasive, euphemistic, confusing, or self-centered, we have chosen to award Cherokee Principal Chief Chad Smith for saying "It's a basic, inherent right to determine our own citizenry. We paid very dearly for those rights" when speaking of the recent final decision to expel the Freedman Cherokee from the tribe in Oklahoma. It may have been best said in a Time Magazine article: "It is ironic that the tribe wants to use the Dawes Rolls--a tool of the United States government-- which discriminated against Native Americans collectively, as a tool of discrimination against a group of blacks." The Time article goes on to note that "when Cherokee voters decided to strip the Freedmen of their full membership they were essentially legitimizing the one-drop rule. What is identity?" posits Smith. "What is an Indian? What is a Cherokee? I would say it's someone part of a recognized community." Recognized, though, meaning on the proper Dawes List — not meaning active members of the tribe, as others have asserted. "Even though Freedmen people didn't participate in tribal councils for many years, they have served in Cherokee schools and hospitals."

Perhaps more importantly, they have considered themselves Cherokee their whole lives. "There's a tremendous amount of cultural identification that former slaves felt with Native tribes, of shared homeland, food, familial ties," says Tiya Miles, a historian at the University of Michigan. "Cherokee had slaves. Cherokee also married, and slept with, blacks. And there were blacks who were adopted into the Cherokee tribe though they had no blood or slave ties. They all walked the Trail of Tears with the Cherokee, from the Deep South to Oklahoma."

## 2010

### **Dick Armey**

Armey is a former Republican member of the U.S. House of Representatives for eighteen years as well as House Majority Leader from 1995-2002, has earned our nod for the Doublespeak Award for his current position as the leader of FreedomWorks. While Armey has a history of obfuscation including a 2000 attack on Al Gore, his work with FreedomWorks caught our attention. For example, Armey and FreedomWorks have claimed not to have a controlling stake in the Tea Party movement, yet they have written a foundational manifesto—"Give Us Liberty: A Tea Party Manifesto"—instructing tea partiers in questionable organizing and fundraising efforts. Armey is also linked to a website called AngryRenter.com, which urges renters to sign an on-line petition to protest proposed bailout of troubled homeowners. However, The Wall Street Journal's Michael M. Phillips, reports that AngryRenter.com is actually a product created by FreedomWorks and not, as their website claims, a spontaneous group. Phillips notes "It's a fake grass-roots effort—what politicians call an AstroTurf campaign." In even grander Doublespeak style, Armey objects to wellness programs and anti-smoking efforts in the health care bill. "If there are no smokers," he reasons, "how are we going to pay for health reform? But then again, if we can pay farmers for not growing tobacco, perhaps we can tax nonsmokers for however much they're not smoking" (*Washington Times*). He disputes the credibility of global warming claimant, "environmental hypochondriacs," arguing "if the lord God almighty made the heavens and the Earth, and he made them to his satisfaction. . . , it is quite pretentious of we little weaklings here on earth to think that, that we are going to destroy God's creation."

For these and many other examples, we choose Dick Armey as this year's recipient of the NCTE Doublespeak Award.

## 2009

### **Glenn Beck**

Beck, a popular radio and television commentator who moved from CNN to Fox News, and who became a prominent critic of liberalism and the Obama administration this year, wrote two *New York Times* bestselling books in 2009: *Glenn Beck's Common Sense: The Case Against an Out-of-Control Government, Inspired by Thomas Paine* and *Arguing with Idiots: How to Stop Small Minds and Big Government*. Beck has also been pushing his "9-12 Project," named for the nine principles and twelve values which he says embody the spirit of the American people on the day after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

That spirit, if we are to believe Beck's own words, is pure doublespeak. When he moved to Fox this year, Beck attacked health care reform by repeatedly telling his audience, "You're about to lose the best health care system in the world." But in 2008, after experiencing problems during a routine surgical procedure, [Beck vehemently complained](#) to his CNN audience that the American health care system had gone "horribly awry." He told viewers it was a "nightmare" system that doesn't care about "average working stiffs" and tries to "shove the patients out the door as fast as they can." Beck concluded one of several diatribes against American doctors and hospitals with this shocker: "Getting well in this country actually will almost kill you"—a phrase that was recently echoed in [Alan Grayson's critique](#) of the two-part Republican health care plan: "Don't get sick. And if you do get sick, die quickly."

[Beck describes his 9-12 project](#) with these words: "We weren't told how to behave that day after 9/11, we just knew. It was right, it was the opposite of what we feel today. Are you ready to be the person you were that day after 9/11, on 9/12?" The twelve values which embody the spirit of the American people on the day after 9/11 include reverence, charity, personal responsibility, and gratitude, and one of his nine principles is, "It is not un-American for me to disagree with authority or to share my personal opinion."

While doublespeak is not one of Beck's explicit values, this 2005 radio comment on the aftermath of 9/11 shows that along with *gratitude* and *sharing one's personal opinion*, doublespeak may be his most important political principle: "This is horrible to say, and I wonder if I'm alone in this. You know it took me about a year to start hating the 9/11 victims' families? . . . When I see a 9-11 victim family on television, or whatever, I'm just like, 'Oh, shut up!' I'm so sick of them because they're always complaining. And we did our best for them."

Glenn Beck had some serious competition for this year's Doublespeak Award: Sarah Palin, Rod Blagojevich, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. For always doing his best for the rest of us, for comparing health care for children and caps on executive salaries with fascism and the Nazis' final solution, the NCTE Public Language Award Committee proudly presents Glenn Beck with its annual Doublespeak Award.

## 2008

### Term: Aspirational Goal

In 2008, this term was used in relation to two issues of global import: the Iraq war and climate change.

George W. Bush has used the term "aspirational goal" in place of setting a deadline for withdrawal of troops in Iraq. Likewise, Bush, members of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum and others have set "aspirational goals" for reducing carbon emissions and slowing global warming.

As textbook Doublespeak, "aspirational goal" is both a tautology and a paradox. Aspirations and goals are the same thing; and yet when the terms are combined, the effect is to undermine them both, producing a phrase that means, in effect, "a goal to which one does not aspire *all that much*." The goal of "aspirational goal," clearly, is to disguise inaction and thwart legitimate aspirations. The Public Language Awards Committee therefore salutes this innovative abuse of language with the 2008 Doublespeak Award.

## 2007

### Alberto Gonzales

In April 2007, then-Attorney General Alberto Gonzales testified to the U.S. Senate with regard to the firing of eight U.S. attorneys by his office. "I'm here today to do my part to ensure that all facts about this matter are brought to light," Gonzales said. "These are not the actions of someone with something to hide."

However, Gonzales's Senate testimony turned out to be a masterpiece of evasion and obfuscation: he insisted that the firings were not politically motivated, while professing not to recall very much about individual cases—or even the meetings or the conversations in which the firings were discussed. In response to questioning by Senator Edward Kennedy, Mr. Gonzales said, "Senator, I have in my mind a recollection as to knowing as to some of these United States attorneys. There are two that I do not recall knowing in my mind what I understood to be the reasons for the removal."

For compelling testimony such as this, the Public Language Award Committee is honored to present the 2007 Doublespeak Award to former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales.

## 2006

### **President George W. Bush**

President George W. Bush is the recipient of the 2006 Doublespeak Award for his Jackson Square speech on Hurricane Katrina and disaster relief, September 15, 2005.

During Bush's September 15 address, he remarked, "As all of us saw on television, there's also some deep, persistent poverty in this region, as well. That poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunity of America. We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action. So let us restore all that we have cherished from yesterday, and let us rise above the legacy of inequality."

However, a week before the President's speech, he signed an executive order suspending the 1931 Davis-Bacon Act, thereby allowing federal contractors rebuilding in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to pay below the prevailing wage.

## 2005

### **Philip A. Cooney, Chief of Staff for the White House Council on Environmental Quality**

"In his editing of scientific reports, Philip Cooney exemplifies a commitment to doublespeak, the subtle art of massaging language to deflect the public's attention from the truth," says Dennis Baron, chair of the NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak.

By using well-placed modifiers and hedges, the nomination says, Cooney supported the Bush administration's inaction and undermined international attempts to improve global warming. Although extreme weather, glacier melting, and ecological changes serve to document the reality of global warming and have hindered his attempts to claim otherwise, Cooney "nonetheless has been effective in slowing down human corrective action." The nomination also notes that after Cooney resigned ("a day after his work was made public"), he was immediately hired by Exxon Mobil.

## 2004

### **The Bush Administration**

President George W. Bush, for the second year in a row, has set a high standard for his team by the inspired invention of the phrase "weapons of mass destruction-related program activities" (1) to describe what has yet to be seen. Further he has made clear the principle of democratic discussion: "[A]s you know, these are open forums, you're able to come and listen to what I have to say." (2) Bush also won for his creative use of language in public statements regarding the reasons why the United States needed to pursue war against Iraq—for unsubstantiated statements, for the lack of evidentiary support, and for the purported manipulation of intelligence data.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's description of the widespread torture at Abu Ghraib as "the excesses of human nature that humanity suffers" (3) was brilliantly mind-befuddling. The Secretary is well served by a Pentagon that erased terms like the Vietnam era "body bag" which became "human remains pouches" during the Gulf War and is now known as "transfer tubes," (4) the transfer of which are to be kept from media sight.

The Justice Department also deserves mention for its ingenious contributions to the cause of helping us not confront the shame of our government fostering torture. Jay S. Bybee, head of the Office of Legal Counsel, advised that, in order to be considered torture, the pain inflicted on a prisoner "must be equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death." Leaving aside the problem of how to quantitatively measure human pain in this way, the memo advised that international laws against torture "may be unconstitutional if applied to interrogation" conducted against suspected terrorists. (5)

1. George W. Bush, State of the Union Address. Washington, DC, January 20, 2004.  
<http://usgovinfo.about.com/library/weekly/aasou2004.htm>.
2. George W. Bush, press conference. Washington, DC, October 28, 2003.  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/10/20031028-2.html>.

3. Defense Department Town Hall Meeting, transcript of remarks by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld. Pentagon, Washington, DC, May 11, 2004.  
<http://www.dod.gov/speeches/2004/sp20040601-secdef0442.html>.
4. William Rivers Pitt, "Without Honor," truthout, November 10, 2003.  
[http://www.truthout.org/docs\\_03/111003A.shtml](http://www.truthout.org/docs_03/111003A.shtml).
5. Mike Allen and Dana Priest, "Memo on Torture Draws Focus to Bush," (The Washington Post), June 9, 2004.

## **2003**

### **President George W. Bush**

When he announced the award, Rudolph Sharpe, speaking of behalf of the NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak, referred to quotes from "Missing Weapons Of Mass Destruction: Is Lying About The Reason For War An Impeachable Offense?" by John W. Dean (FindLaw.com, June 6, 2003) as evidence that Bush is deserving of the award.

"The unequivocal statements made by Bush regarding the reasons that the 'United States needed to pursue the most radical actions any nation can take-acts of war against another nation,' remain unsubstantiated. Weapons inspectors continue to search for 'thousands of tons of chemical agents,' 'a growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles,' and 'tons of sarin, mustard, and VX nerve agent.' That 'Iraq continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised' is still a statement of questionable veracity," said Sharpe. He added, "As former presidential counsel John Dean has suggested, 'Presidential statements, particularly on matters of national security, are held to an expectation of the highest standard of truthfulness.'"

## **2002**

### **The New York State Regents**

The Doublespeak Award was given to the New York State Regents, in whose English examination last year reading passages were silently edited to remove anything that might cause "any student to feel ill at ease when taking the test." For example, a passage from the work of Isaac Bashevis Singer about Jewish life in Europe was excised to remove all references to Judaism, changing "most Jewish women" to "most women."

## **2001**

### **The Defense Department**

The Defense Department won the award for its creative use of language in public pronouncements regarding the Missile Defense System under development. The winning nomination explained that "Department of Defense spokespersons had to resort to considerable linguistic ingenuity to defend the test performance of its system that is supposed to erect a shield against intercontinental missiles. Several tests last year failed, but the Pentagon, with perfect Orwellian form, simply redefined 'success' and 'failure.'"

## **2000**

### **The Tobacco Industry**

For its media blitzes portraying tobacco companies as the benefactors of children, abused women, and disaster victims-"abusing language in pursuit of their right to sell a deadly drug."

The World Health Organization's recent international condemnation of tobacco companies, which claimed the companies are secretly trying to counter attempts to reduce smoking and warned that tobacco companies might attempt to undermine work on a new global anti-smoking accord, also contributed to the industry's winning this award.

Tobacco companies' attempts to make their legally mandated participation in smoking-cessation programs appear virtuous make the industry a still more deserving recipient of the award, according to the selection committee.

## **1999**

### **National Rifle Association**

The nomination offered excerpts from two speeches to show the NRA's "artful twisting of language to blur issues, the invocation of patriotism, reverence, love of freedom, and the opposing use of dread words to color the opposition."

In one of the speeches, NRA President Charlton Heston said: "The majesty of the Second Amendment, that our Founders so divinely captured and crafted into your birthright, guarantees that no government despot, no renegade faction of armed forces, no roving gangs of criminals, no breakdown of law and order, no massive anarchy, no force of evil or crime or oppression from within or from without, can ever rob you of the liberties that define your Americanism. . . . Let me be absolutely clear. The Founding Fathers guaranteed this freedom because they knew no tyranny can ever arise among a people endowed with the right to keep and bear arms. That's why you and your descendants need never fear fascism, state-run faith, refugee camps, brainwashing, ethnic cleansing, or especially, submission to the wanton will of criminals.

## **1998**

### **Justice Clarence Thomas**

For using hypocritical, loaded, and inexact language to mislead the public about his real nature and intentions. A New York Times article (July 30, 1998) by Neil Lewis reported that Justice Thomas called critics of his conservative opinions "illiterate" and suggested they were racist in a speech he delivered to the annual convention of the National Bar Association in Memphis on July 29. Actually, Justice Thomas' critics believe he is guilty of hypocrisy for claiming he is the target of discrimination by both blacks and whites and for speaking out against affirmative action, when he has personally benefited from the practice.

Jack E. White wrote that Thomas "owes his meteoric rise exclusively to the patronage of conservative white Republicans with little interest in racial equality." In the Time article from August 10, 1998, White also referred to a remark by retired federal judge A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., that Thomas "has done more to turn back the clock of racial progress than has perhaps any other African American public official."

## **1997**

### **President Bill Clinton, Trent Lott, and Newt Gingrich**

For engaging in bipartisan deceit in which the balanced-budget agreement was portrayed as a "great victory for all Americans" that "put America's fiscal house in order again," even though the agreement actually ensures the growth of the budget deficit. As Newsweek economics columnist Robert Samuelson pointed out, the tax cuts and new spending included in the so-called balanced budget agreement will lead to increases in the budget deficit over the next three years; achieving the balanced budget project to occur in 2002 requires Congress to make spending cuts in the future.

In his August 11, 1997, article, Samuelson noted that a balanced budget could have been achieved in fiscal 1998 with modest spending cuts. The balanced-budget deal shows, he said, "an enormous contempt for the public's intelligence and integrity."

## **1996**

### **Joe Klein**

For statements after his authorship of the novel *Primary Colors* was revealed, "at the very least compromised standards of journalism." Klein emphatically denied he was the author to CBS, one of his employers, and to The New York Times. He later explained in Newsweek that he chose the ethics of book publishing over the ethics of journalism. In the July 29 issue, Klein refers to his statements as "little white lies" and chides his critics for "chattering and battering and pontificating on the air about what I did."

"No committee member faulted Klein the novelist," NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak Chair Keith Gilyard said, "but Klein the journalist." Noting that Klein criticized the Clintons for "lawyering, fudging, misdirection, obfuscation, and generally slouchy behavior in response to difficult questions" in a January 22, 1996, article in Newsweek, Gilyard said, "Klein used loaded language to attack others for the same type of behavior that he practices. As one of the Doublespeak Committee members put it, Klein is guilty of 'utter hypocrisy.'"

## **1995**

### **Newt Gingrich**

For fundamental contradictions in his book *To Renew America* and for his role as a key author of the Republican Contract with America, which uses glittering, euphemistic titles to mask the true purpose of its acts.

Time magazine writer Robert Wright pointed out in his article "Newt the Blameless" that Gingrich states in his book that "true" Americans don't look for someone to blame when confronted with a problem, then goes on "to survey America's problems and blame them on various people . . . The 'bureaucrats' have helped destroy the family . . . the liberal 'elites' (in a 'calculated effort') have helped 'discredit this civilization,' sapping faith in American values." In the Republican Contract with America, "The Personal Responsibility Act" calls for significant cuts to and restrictions on welfare benefits. "The Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act" has no direct provisions either for creating jobs or enhancing wages; rather it consists of capital gains tax cuts and the dismantling of federal health, safety, and environmental regulations.

**1994**

### **Rush Limbaugh**

For distorting the truth on nearly 1,000 media outlets nationwide. The liberal watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting issued a report in June which documented dozens of verbal and written statements from Limbaugh which it says were inaccurate.

For example, FAIR quoted Limbaugh as saying that long lines at gas pumps in the 1970s "were a direct result of the foreign oil powers playing tough because they didn't fear Jimmy Carter." However, FAIR pointed out that the first and most serious lines occurred in late 1973 and early 1974, "during the administration of Limbaugh hero Richard Nixon." FAIR's report concluded that Limbaugh's broadcasts and publications amounted to a "reign of error."

**1993**

### **Department of Defense**

For using deceptive language that cost the country almost 350 billion dollars for the largest military buildup in American history. The General Accounting Office (GAO), the investigative agency for Congress, issued a report that concluded that "military officials misled Congress about the cost, the performance, and the necessity of the most expensive weapons systems built in the 1980s."

For example, the Air Force, responding to a charge that it deliberately falsified information in a report before Congress on the B1-B bomber, said it did not lie, but "inadvertently disclosed incorrect information." The Pentagon denied that in developing the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or "Star Wars" project, it had rigged a crucial test on which further funding depended. Although officials admitted that a target missile was artificially heated to make it appear ten times bigger to a heat-seeking interceptor missile, they contended the target missile was "enhanced," not "rigged." The progress of the program and the sophistication of the tests, as well as their success rates, were also exaggerated in reports to Congress.

**1992**

### **President George Bush**

At the end of the war in the Persian Gulf, President Bush expressed the hope that "out of all this [the war] there will be less proliferation of all different types of weapons." He also said that "it would be tragic if the nations of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf were now . . . to embark on a new arms race." Since those remarks, the Department of Defense has reversed a 25-year-old policy and now spends millions of dollars of taxpayers' money to support arms trade shows around the world in an attempt to sell more U.S. arms to as many countries as possible. With this help from the Defense Department, U.S. weapons manufacturers have exported a record-breaking \$23 billion worth of weaponry to foreign governments, a 64 percent increase over the previous year. Most of the increased sales went to countries in the Middle East. As Newsweek magazine observed, "While preaching restraint, the United States has agreed to ship \$13 billion worth of weapons to the troubled region [the Middle East] since the end of the gulf conflict, making [the United States] the Middle East's biggest arms merchant."

In his acceptance speech at the Republican convention, President Bush disguised his attempt to divert public funds for private schools by saying "I say every parent and child should have a real choice of schools-public, private, or religious." The key word here is "choice." In one sense, parents now have such

a choice, if they have enough money. The Bush plan offers \$1,000 as a voucher to parents-still far from enough money to send a child to a private school, except for those who now send their children to private schools. Thus the Bush plan would take money from the poor to help the rich support private schools, a plan he calls "a real choice." President Bush's manipulation of genuine discontent with bad schools and of a genuine desire of all parents to provide the best for their children is an outstanding example of public doublespeak.

Finally, during the presidential election campaign, President George Bush charged that as Governor of Arkansas Bill Clinton raised taxes and fees 128 times. But as The Wall Street Journal and others pointed out, this figure was exceptionally distorted because it included a number of separate provisions of the same tax increases and many routine fee increases. Indeed, The Wall Street Journal noted that the same methods of counting taxes applied to the Federal Government under Presidents Reagan and Bush would produce a figure of 327 tax increases and 250 tariff increases. However, officials of the Bush campaign continued to use the misleading figure. Said one official of the Bush campaign: "What does it really matter whether the number is 128 or 58 or whatever? That's not important. . . . The 128 figure is just an illustration of the real issue, that's all."

## **1991**

### **U.S. Department of Defense**

For language its spokespersons in Washington and in the military used to gloss over realities of the war in the Persian Gulf. Massive bombing attacks were called "efforts"; warplanes were called "weapons systems" or "force packages"; a bombing mission was called "visiting a site."

William Lutz, chair of the NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak said that buildings and human beings that were the targets of bombing were called "hard" and "soft targets." During their "visits," Lutz said, these "weapons systems" "degraded," "neutralized," "attrited," "suppressed," "eliminated," "cleansed," "sanitized," "impacted," "decapitated," or "took out" targets.

## **1990**

### **President George Bush**

For using public language to waffle and obscure his intentions on various issues: taxes, maternity and caregiving leave for mothers, preservation of wetlands, high-level exchanges with Chinese officials following the Tiananmen Square massacre, and the U.S. invasion of Panama.

Examples: (1-a) "No new taxes." (1-b) "tax revenue increases." (2-a) "We . . . need to assure that women do not have to worry about getting their jobs back after having a child or caring for a child during a serious illness." (2-b) veto of the Parental and Medical Leave bill: White House statement: the President "has always been opposed to the federal government mandating what every business in this country should do."

(3) Doublespeak to avoid the term "invasion" with reference to Panama: "Operation Just Cause"; "directed our armed forces to protect the lives of American citizens in Panama"; "deployed forces" to Panama; conducted "efforts to support the democratic processes in Panama"; assured "the integrity of the Panama Canal", etc.

## **1989**

### **The Exxon Corporation**

For calling some 35 miles of Alaskan beaches "environmentally clean" and "environmentally stabilized." In his announcement speech, Doublespeak Committee Chair William Lutz noted that various major news media subsequently reported the visible presence of oil along the coast in the area where the supertanker Exxon Valdez ran aground March 24, 1989.

The Philadelphia Inquirer (May 26) reported that beaches declared by Exxon to be clean or stabilized were still covered with oil. . . . Wipe any stone and come away with a handful of oil. Newsweek (Sept. 18) reported that in the spill area "the rocks were gritty, sticky, and dark brown. . . ." Lutz noted Exxon spokespersons' gradual shift from calling beaches "clean" to calling them "treated" [so that] "the natural inhabitants can live there without harm."

**1988**

**Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, Admiral William Crowe, and Rear Admiral William Fogarty**

For language used to explain the downing of Iran Air Flight 655 by the U.S. cruiser Vincennes in the Persian Gulf July 3. Doublespeak Committee Chair William Lutz cited Secretary Carlucci, Admiral Crowe, and Rear Admiral Fogarty for language used in the report on the incident and for comments made in the August 19 news conference held to release and discuss the report. Admiral Fogarty is the author of the report, titled "Formal Investigation into the Circumstances Surrounding the Downing of Iran Air Flight 655 on July 3, 1988."

In his award announcement speech, Lutz said, "The language used in the official report and the language used during the press conference was filled with the doublespeak of omission, distortion, contradiction, and misdirection. One reporter called the report an 'enormous jigsaw puzzle with key pieces missing.' In addition to censoring essential information, such as the names of almost all the participants . . . the report also lacks any original source information such as statements by participants and any of the data recorded by the ship's computers."

Lutz noted that at the news conference, Admiral Crowe said that "a number of mistakes were made," by the crew of the Vincennes and admitted that "some of the information given to Captain Rogers during the engagement proved not to be accurate." Nevertheless Secretary Carlucci was quoted as saying, ". . . these errors or mistakes were not crucial" to the decision to shoot the airliner down. Lutz quoted Admiral Crowe as claiming that "to say there were errors made . . . is not necessarily to suggest culpability."

**1987**

**Lt. Col. Oliver North and Rear Admiral John Poindexter**

For language used in testifying before the congressional Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition: excerpts from numerous examples, as presented in Doublespeak Committee Chair William Lutz's announcement speech:

Lutz said, "Colonel North used the words 'residuals' and 'diversions' to refer to the millions of dollars of profits . . . created by overcharging Iran for arms so that the money could be used to finance the contras. . . (North) also said that he 'cleaned things up,' he was 'cleaning up the historical record,' . . . meaning he lied, destroyed official government documents, and created false documents. . . . 'Director Casey and I fixed that testimony and removed the offensive portions. We fixed it by omission.' Official lies," Lutz observed, "were 'plausible deniability.'"

According to Poindexter's testimony, Lutz said, "one does not lie but 'misleads' or 'withholds information.' . . . In Poindexter's world," Lutz noted, "one can 'acquiesce' in a shipment of weapons while at the same time not authorize the shipment. One can transfer millions of dollars of government money as a 'technical implementation' without making a 'substantive decision.' . . . Yet Poindexter can protest that it is not 'fair to say that I have misinformed Congress or other Cabinet officers. . . . With regard to the Cabinet officers, I didn't withhold anything from them that they didn't want withheld from them.'"

**1986**

**Officials of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Morton Thiokol, and Rockwell International**

For comments made following the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, among them: NASA official on whether shuttle performance had improved: "I think our performance in terms of the orbital performance, we knew more about the envelope we were operating under, and we have been pretty accurately staying in that. . . . I think we have been able to characterize the performance more as a function of our launch experience as opposed to it improving as a function of time."

NASA also described the shuttle explosion as "an anomaly," and the bodies of the astronauts as "recovered components," and the astronauts' coffins as "crew transfer containers."

Morton Thiokol engineer on effect of cold weather: "I made the comment that lower temperatures are in the direction of badness for both O-rings, because it slows down the timing function."

Rockwell executive on ice formation on the launch platform: "I felt that by telling them we did not have a sufficient database and could not analyze the trajectory of the ice, I felt he understood that Rockwell was not giving a positive indication we were for the launch."

**1985**

**The Central Intelligence Agency**

For its "Psychological Warfare Manual," prepared for rebels fighting the government of Central Nicaragua. Doublespeak Committee Chair William Lutz quoted news reports in which CIA Director William Casey said the manual's purpose was "to make every guerilla persuasive in face-to-face communication" and to develop "political awareness," and insisted that the manual's "emphasis is on education. . . ." The CIA manual, Lutz noted, "gave advice on the 'selective use of violence' to 'neutralize' Nicaraguan officials, such as judges, police, and state security officials. . . ."

**1984**

**U.S. State Department**

For announcing that it will no longer use the word "killing" in official reports on the status of human rights in other countries, but will replace "killing" with the phrase "unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of life." Also (after the U.S. invasion of Grenada) for stating that U.S. and Caribbean occupation forces were not arresting Grenadians and others suspected of opposing the invasion. "We are detaining people," a State Department official said. "They should be described as detainees."

**1983**

**President Ronald Reagan**

For calling the MX intercontinental ballistic missile "Peacekeeper," for commenting that "a vote against MX production today is a vote against arms control tomorrow," and for the following statement to deputies of the Costa Rican National Assembly, condemning secret military operations: "Any nation destabilizing its neighbors by protecting guerillas and exporting violence should forfeit close and fruitful relations with any people who truly love peace and freedom."

Doublespeak Committee Chair William Lutz said, "Subsequent news reports revealed that the United States, through the CIA, was recruiting, arming, equipping, training, and directing" what have been described as "clandestine military operations against Nicaragua."

**1982**

**Republican National Committee**

For its television commercial crediting President Reagan for a cost-of-living hike in Social Security benefits that in fact stemmed from a pre-Reagan law. The director of communications for the Republican committee responded to the award by saying, "Perhaps they and our children would be better off if they spent more time teaching English and less time engaging in cheap, political demagoguery."

**1981**

**Alexander Haig, Secretary of State**

For a series of statements made to Congressional committees about the murder of three American nuns and a religious lay worker in El Salvador.

**1980**

**President-elect Ronald Reagan**

For campaign oratory "filled with inaccurate assertions and statistics and misrepresentations of his past record." The Los Angeles Times and Time magazine listed some 18 untrue or inaccurate public statements by Mr. Reagan. As The New York Times noted, Mr. Reagan "doesn't let the truth spoil a good anecdote or effective symbol. . . . Mr. Reagan's speeches are peppered with . . . omissions, exaggerations, and reinterpretations of his experience as Governor of California and as a candidate." Mr. Reagan, for example, mentioned that he refunded \$5.7 billion in property taxes to Californians. But he never mentioned that as Governor he raised taxes by a total of \$21 billion. He also claimed that General Motors "has to employ 23,300 fulltime employees to comply with government-required paperwork." A GM executive pointed out, however, that the firm has only 4,900 persons to do all its paperwork. And even after it was disproved, Mr. Reagan continued to claim that Alaska has more oil than Saudi Arabia. (From remarks by William Lutz, 1980 Chair, Committee on Public Doublespeak.)

**1979**

**The nuclear power industry**

"For inventing a whole lexicon of jargon and euphemisms used before, during, and after the Three Mile Island accident and serving to downplay the dangers of nuclear accidents. An explosion is called 'energetic disassembly' and a fire, 'rapid oxidation.' A reactor accident is an 'event,' an 'incident,' an 'abnormal evolution,' a 'normal aberration' or a 'plant transient.' Plutonium contamination is 'infiltration,' or 'plutonium has taken up residence.'"--William Lutz, 1979 Chair, Committee on Public Doublespeak.

**1978**

**Earl Clinton Bolton**

A memorandum written by Bolton for the CIA in 1968 and recently declassified, entitled "Agency-Academic Relations," began by suggesting that those assisting the agency "may be on the defensive." The memo advises academics to defend themselves by explaining their CIA involvement "as a contribution to . . . proper academic goals. . . . It should be stressed that when an apologia is necessary it can best be made: (1) by some distant academic who is not under attack, (2) in a 'respectable' publication of general circulation (e.g., Harper's, Saturday Review, Vital Speeches, etc.) and (3) with full use of the jargon of the academy (as illustrated below). . . . Two doctrines fiercely protected by the academy are 'academic freedom' and 'privilege and tenure.' . . . When attacked for aiding the Agency the academic (or institution) should base a rejoinder on these sacred doctrines." Bolton concludes by encouraging the Agency to "have an insulator such as RAND or IDA. Such entities have quite good acceptance in academia. . . . Such an independent corporation should of course have a ringing name (e.g., Institute for a Free Society) . . ."

**1977**

**The Pentagon and the Energy Research and Development Administration**

In explaining qualities of the neutron bomb: "an efficient nuclear weapon that eliminates an enemy with a minimum degree of damage to friendly territory."

**1976**

**The State Department**

The Department's announcement of plans to appoint a consumer affairs coordinator said the coordinator would: "review existing mechanisms of consumer input, thruput, and output, and seek ways of improving these linkages via the 'consumer communication channel.'"

**1975**

**Yasir Arafat, PLO Leader**

In answer to a charge that the PLO wanted to destroy Israel, he was quoted as saying, "They are wrong. We do not want to destroy any people. It is precisely because we have been advocating coexistence that we have shed so much blood."

**1974**

**Colonel David H. E. Opfer, USAF Press Officer in Cambodia**

After a U.S. bombing raid, he told some reporters: "You always write it's bombing, bombing, bombing. It's not bombing! It's air support!"