

Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa

Okay, I admit, I did it. I wrote about politics. Although my wise and astute editor and publisher warned me, I did it anyway and it felt great. Unfortunately, I hear that a few politicians have their knickers in a twist. From what I understand, they took exception to me poking fun at their expertise in the use of political speak to avoid icky things like accountability. Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa — I am truly sorry, for I have erred.

Apparently, comments about being less than specific about goals, intentions, and lack of strategies designed to fulfill campaign promises don't offend politicians. They can deal with that. They do, however, have a big problem with telling readers the wrong reasons for their ambiguity, secrecy, and seemingly endless pursuit of obfuscating the truth. You see, they are quite comfortable with political speak. It is an excellent vehicle for telling the truth, the whole truth, and everything but the truth, especially when they have what they perceive as legitimate reasons for doing so.

The primary alleged legitimate reason is: (now bear with me on this, I promise you, I am not fabricating anything), to not set a precedent. "Huh?" you say. Allow me to explain. Yes, they fear setting a precedent. If just one politician actually speaks with clarity, they are afraid that other politicians will be expected to do the same. Most would not survive such an extreme demand.

Can you imagine all politicians speaking in clear, easy-to-understand terms about their intentions, agendas, campaign promises, and ways of dealing with sensitive issues? The face of worldwide politics would change forever. Nobody would pay attention to the news. Who wants to watch news without scandal and intrigue anyway? Why bother? Nothing could be more boring.

However, the absence of political speak could have serious effects on the economy. Sponsors would cease supporting TV and radio news because audiences would be non-existent. Newspaper and book sales would plummet. If politicians turned honest and forthcoming, we wouldn't need to mon-



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

itor their activities. Having faith that they are doing their job is something we could take for granted. At one time, we assumed that about the president. You would think we'd have learned from that bitter lesson.

Another item worthy of mention is that touchy little issue of the proper way to address the actions of other politicians, particularly if the person in question is a member of an opposing party. If the speaker is a Democrat, the question concerning a fictitious issue might be worded to his opponent like this: "I would like to encourage my esteemed Republican colleague to consider all possibilities other than hastily awarding the largest defense contract in the history of the country to his ex-business partner of three weeks before being elected to office. Does he think it possible that the bid process might apply in this situation?" The political speak drips with enough unmitigated sarcasm to cause terminal nausea.

Although the rhetoric might appear contrived through our mortal eyes, the technique satisfies the unspoken political code:

"If you don't blatantly expose the specifics of my agenda in public, I won't expose yours."

Even if the party in question were guilty of renting a castle on the French Riviera in the middle of a Washington winter for holding a committee meeting on the impact of the burgeoning rodent population in the Mekong Delta, his fellow politicians would not condemn him. They might say something as strong as: "It appears as if my respected counterpart in the opposing party is being extreme in his expenditures for creating an optimum atmosphere for addressing a pressing problem. However, I am sure that his concern for absolute security is within the boundaries of fiscal responsibility, which he will be more than happy to explain."

And in the blink of an eye, without the smallest display of alarm or anxiety, the party in question will respond with: "Thank you for your vote of confidence. After years of experience in the service of our country, you have gained the insight to recognize the importance for uncompromised security. For those reasons, I am sure that all present will accept your explanation as adequate for our purposes, lest we put accomplishing our common goals at risk." Another example of political strategy performed at its frustrating best.

It is all part of that complicated system that those in elected and appointed political positions think we don't understand.

Four days and counting: spring arrives on Monday

Crocuses are blooming, the ospreys are due back, and windbreakers are beginning to replace parkas. Surely top-down convertibles will be the next indication that the darkest season has passed. In just four days, at precisely 1:26 p.m. on Monday, March 20, spring will officially begin.

The vernal equinox — the day when the sun will cross directly over the Earth's equator, resulting in days and nights of equal length — will arrive. On the same day, people in the southern hemisphere are passing from summer into fall.

Need help with taxes? Go to the library

For the 24th consecutive year, free tax assistance will be provided to older taxpayers as well as low-income people through the Tax Counseling for the Elderly and Volunteers in Tax Assistance programs.

The tax counselors for these IRS/AARP volunteer programs are: Dick Allphin, Cliff Largess, Anne Livingston, Bob Loewenthal, Michaela McInnis, and Ken Taylor.

This free confidential one-on-one income tax assistance (including E-filing) will be available from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays at the Jamestown library through April 17.

Taxpayers who are housebound may contact Cliff Largess for assistance at 294-1612.

Taxpayers who wish to use this service should bring this and last year's tax materials with them.



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