

# George W. Bush's three principles: lies, fraud and theft

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With his nationally televised speech Wednesday night, Republican Governor George W. Bush became the first candidate in US history to attempt, openly and before the American people, to gain the presidency through the suppression of votes.

In supporting the actions of the Florida state government—headed by his brother, Governor Jeb Bush—to disallow the results of hand counts and discard the votes of thousands of Floridians, George W. Bush piled one falsehood upon another. As with all practitioners of the “big lie” technique, his aim was to convince not by the plausibility of his arguments, but rather by the sheer brazenness and repetition of his claims.

“All Americans want a fair and accurate count of the votes in Florida,” the Texas governor declared. Not all Americans. The Bush campaign, as is obvious to all who have eyes and wish to see, does not want “a fair and accurate count of the votes in Florida,” which is why it has pursued every possible means to block a comprehensive count of all the votes cast on election day.

Bush said he wanted a count “that measures up to the highest standards and principles outlined in our Constitutions and our laws.” Those standards and principles are summed up in the motto “one person—one vote,” which is precisely what Bush and his confederates in Florida are seeking to subvert.

Next Bush enunciated his three principles: “This process must be fair, this process must be accurate, and this process must be final.” It is obviously not fair to arbitrarily exclude the votes of people who went to the polls. It is transparent that the purpose of such a procedure is to arrive at a result that is not accurate. As for the principle of finality—for the Bush camp this means certifying the result that it wants, not the result dictated by the will of the electorate.

Bush elaborated on his principle of “fairness”: the vote, he said, must be “fair to voters throughout America, fair to voters in Florida, and fair to voters in different counties in Florida.” If Bush has his way, voters throughout America, who cast a plurality of ballots for Bush's Democratic opponent, will see their choice overturned on the basis of an overtly partisan and undemocratic procedure in Florida. Within Florida itself, thousands of individuals have taken to the streets to protest their disenfranchisement at the hands of Bush's local allies, and at least two counties have been denied their legal right to conduct a manual recount.

Bush continued: “I honor and respect the value of every single vote. That's why my campaign supported the automatic recount of all the votes in Florida.” With regard to the first sentence, candor would have required Bush to add “in my favor.” The second sentence is a non sequitur: since the initial recount was automatic, the Bush campaign could not stop it.

The next sentence—“Everyone in Florida has had his or her vote counted once”—is a brazen lie. As the whole world knows, tens of thousands of votes, mainly of black and immigrant workers and other likely Gore supporters, have not been counted.

In Palm Beach County, for example, a deceptive and possibly illegal ballot caused 19,000 ballots to be double-punched, and consequently discarded, in the initial machine count. In precincts heavily populated by Haitian-Americans there have been reports of ballots that were pre-punched for Bush. Tens of thousands of others who went to the polls carrying voter registration cards were told by election officials that they could not vote.

The ballots of thousands of other voters were misread by voting machines—a discrepancy which can be corrected only by a hand count, which the Bush camp is determined to prevent.

Elaborating on his second principle, accuracy, Bush said, “This process must be accurate. As Americans have watched on television, they have seen for themselves that manual counting, with individuals making subjective decisions about voter intent, introduces human error and politics into the vote-counting process.”

This is another lie. Even before a single vote was hand-counted, Bush's initial margin in Florida was cut by 80 percent when ballots were recounted by machine, demonstrating the well-known fact that voting machines are fallible. That is precisely why in state after state the long-established procedure is for election authorities to conduct a hand recount in close races. Bush himself signed a law in Texas declaring hand counting to be the preferred method for obtaining the most accurate result. Until the Bush camp invented the novel theory that human intervention into the ballot-counting process was intrinsically undemocratic, it was generally accepted that both voters and candidates had a right to seek this recourse when a result was in dispute.

Many have already noted the irony of a man who campaigned on a platform of “trusting the people” and empowering local government now expounding on the organic incompetence and dishonesty of human vote counters, and the need to ride roughshod over the decisions of local authorities—which only demonstrates that hypocrisy goes hand in hand with deceit.

Speaking of the need for finality, Bush said, “This is precisely why the laws of the state of Florida have deadlines for certification of the election vote.” Declaring that the deadlines had passed and the votes had been certified, he echoed the earlier assertion of Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris—who happens to be a Bush elector and state co-chair of the Bush election campaign—that the final result would be announced on Saturday, once overseas absentee ballots had been added to the existing official vote count.

The claim that the Bush campaign is guided by the rule of law is another lie. In the first place, Florida laws are ambiguous on the finality of the deadline for accepting ballots from local election authorities, and they give the secretary of state considerable discretion. Moreover, the state election laws give local authorities the right to conduct hand counts, a right that is rendered meaningless if the secretary of state arbitrarily refuses to allow them the time needed to carry out the procedure.

In the event, Harris defied the clear intent of a state court ruling handed down on Monday affirming the right of counties to conduct hand counts and barring her from arbitrarily refusing to accept amended vote tallies submitted after the 5 PM Tuesday deadline. This ruling was reinforced Tuesday by the Florida Supreme Court, which summarily rejected her appeal for a court order to end all hand counts. Her announcement Wednesday night rejecting the requests of three counties to conduct hand counts and submit amended vote totals preempted further hearings that had been set by the state Supreme Court for Thursday morning.

Far from upholding the election laws of Florida, moreover, the Bush campaign has gone into federal court in an attempt to overturn them, so as to block counties from carrying out hand counts.

Bush went on to reject the proposal made earlier that evening by Vice President Gore for a state-wide manual recount of the votes in Florida. Once again, his explanation was a combination of falsehood and non sequitur. He accused Gore of proposing a continuation of “selective hand recounts that are neither fair nor accurate, or compounding the error by extending a flawed process statewide.” How the supposed evil of selectivity would be compounded by making the process universal, Bush did not say.

A statewide manual recount would be “neither fair nor accurate,” he continued. “It would be arbitrary and chaotic.” This last charge exemplifies another staple of the Bush camp—accusing your opponent of the very crimes that you are committing. Those who are arbitrarily suppressing the voting rights of tens of thousands of Floridians denounce their opponents for arbitrariness. Similarly, those who have acted from day one to disrupt an orderly, lawful and accurate compilation of the Florida vote, accuse their victims of creating chaos.

As mendacious as the body of Bush's speech was, his peroration achieved new heights—or depths—of cynicism and deceit. “We have a responsibility to conduct ourselves with dignity and honor,” he declared. This from a candidate who has employed the basest methods of conspiracy and fraud to hijack an election, not hesitating to plot with his brother in the Florida statehouse and his first cousin, John Ellis, at Fox TV to disenfranchise voters and stampede public opinion.

“We have a responsibility,” he continued, “to make sure that those who speak for us do not poison our politics. And we have the responsibility to respect the law and not seek to undermine it when we do not like its outcome.” This from the head of a campaign that has employed character assassination and slander as a central component of its modus operandi, and the leader of a party that has devoted the past eight years to a covert campaign of dirty tricks aimed at humiliating, destabilizing and bringing down an elected president.

Even as Bush was posing as the defender of the rule of law, his fellow Texan, House Majority Whip Tom Delay—who spearheaded the Republican drive to impeach Bill Clinton—was circulating among Republican congressmen a proposal for the House and Senate to reject the electors from Florida, should the vote there ultimately favor Al Gore.

In a final flourish, Bush declared, “The outcome of this election will

not be the result of deals or efforts to mold public opinion. The outcome of this election will be determined by the votes and by law.” A more accurate summation of the position of the Bush campaign would read: “The outcome of this election will not be determined by the votes or by law. The outcome of this election will be determined by conspiracy, fraud and efforts to pollute public opinion.”

Anyone who retains a sense of the genuine democratic traditions embodied in the American Revolution and the Civil War struggle against slavery can only react to this morass of lies with repugnance. The whole world knows that Bush's every sentence was laced with deceit, including those who wrote the speech, the man who gave it, and the journalists who reported it.

What is the objective significance of such crude and shameless lying? It is an attempt to conceal the glaring contrast between pretense and reality, between the undemocratic and unconstitutional aims of the Bush campaign and its need to maintain a democratic façade. The cornerstone of Bush's campaign, after all, was the slogan of “compassionate conservatism,” a mantra conjured up so the Republican right could adopt a public posture of moderation and concern, while preparing to impose the most reactionary social agenda in modern American history.

The cabal of political operatives, reactionary lawyers, judges, corporate executives and media scoundrels lined up behind the Texas governor is counting on the complacency of the liberal media to brazen its way to the seizure of the White House. They are counting as well on the flaccid and demoralized character of their Democratic opponents, who proceed as if they were dealing with people who play by the normal rules of bourgeois politics.

The Democrats proved in the impeachment conspiracy that they are incapable of conducting a serious struggle to defend democratic rights against the extreme right-wing forces that control the Republican Party. They themselves have lurched to the right, and sought in every way possible to adapt themselves to the political elements that articulate more openly and ruthlessly the demands of the financial and corporate oligarchy. As in the impeachment crisis, the Democrats are once again revealing that they fear the emergence of a movement of social and political struggle from below more than they fear a victory of the Republican right.

The journalistic establishment will not speak the truth, but the *World Socialist Web Site* will: in the Bush campaign the American people are confronting the rise of a gangster element to the summit of the political establishment. In a capitalist society with staggering levels of social inequality, a frightened ruling elite is resorting to criminal methods to hang onto its wealth and privileges. It increasingly looks with contempt on the traditional institutions and methods upon which it has relied in the past, and turns instead toward authoritarian forms of rule.



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