

In the Shadows of Promise

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20 AUGUST 2009

President Barack Obama took office with an extraordinary set of promises as a candidate. He has fulfilled many of the promises to the left-wing base of his party, such as his executive order three days after he was inaugurated restoring the funding of abortions with foreign-aid money.

But how has he done with the popular campaign promises he made to middle America, the promises that got him elected? Candidate Obama pledged to cut taxes for the middle class, lower overall taxes, cut government spending, reduce the deficit, cut the cost of healthcare waste, eliminate most government secrecy, and reform ethics at the White House. Here is a review of these domestic policy promises in the categories of ethics, transparency in government, and fiscal responsibility, along with an assessment of how earnestly they were carried out.

Ethics

No Lobbyists Funding His Campaign

Promise: "I have done more than any other candidate in this race to take on lobbyists — and won. They have not funded my campaign." (Barack Obama, [Speech in Des Moines, Iowa, November 10, 2007](#))

Track Record: The independent watchdog group [SourceWatch.org found](#) that lobbyists had funded Obama's Senate campaign, as well as his presidential campaign from the beginning. By the time Obama had made the statement above, it was already false. Public Citizen had already listed nine different lobbyists who had contributed to the Obama campaign, in addition to "bundling" individual contributions averaging more than \$100,000 each to Obama's presidential campaign during 2007. During the 2008 campaign, Obama accepted bundled contributions of nearly one million dollars (\$997,095) from Goldman Sachs executives, the same firm that received tens of billions in bailout funds through the TARP legislation Obama backed in September 2008.

Obama later backtracked, claiming that lobbyists who funded him didn't impact his decisions. Of course, this is the same claim all politicians who take money from lobbyists make.

Verdict: Outright Lie

No More Executive Branch Electioneering

Promise: "Remove the use of public office for partisan advantage: Public office should not be used to advance political interests. Too often federal workers dismiss the law that governs political activity, both because of political incentives not to use it and because of inadequate enforcement mechanisms. As president, Barack Obama will issue an Executive Order banning the use of public office to

further partisan advantage in political elections." (["Taking Back Our Government" pamphlet](#) on BarackObama.com)

Track Record: Obama issued an "ethics" executive order, but it omitted mention of banning use of the executive branch for partisan purposes. Partisan use of public office begins at the top in the Obama White House. Obama orchestrated a partisan political pressure maneuver using his cabinet secretaries on July 13, getting four cabinet secretaries to write on government stationery to Arizona Governor Janice Brewer to pressure Republican Arizona Senator Jon Kyl to stop criticizing Obama's "stimulus" law. Kyl had suggested on nationwide television days earlier that the "stimulus" bill didn't work and that all uncommitted projects from the "stimulus" bill ought to be stopped in order to prevent increasing the deficit further. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood [sarcastically wrote](#) to Brewer, "If you prefer to forfeit the money we are making available to your state, as Senator Kyl suggests, please let me know." Interior Secretary [Ken Salazar wrote](#) an almost identical line, except he omitted Kyl's name: "If you prefer to forfeit the money we are making available to Arizona, please let me know." Agriculture Secretary [Vilsack](#) and HUD Secretary [Donovan](#) also wrote letters to Brewer. "It was a thinly veiled threat," [Kyl told](#) Fox News' Greta Van Susteren. "And they combined that with some ads that the Democrat campaign committee ran on their website, and so on."

Verdict: Outright Lie

Political Appointees With Close Ties to Industry

Promise: "No political appointees in an Obama Administration will be permitted to work on regulations or contracts directly and substantially related to their prior employer for two years. A two-year ban will remove the incentive to employers to provide some sort of financial incentive, such as [a] generous severance package, to an employee leaving for a government job with an agency that regulates them." (["Taking Back Our Government" pamphlet](#) on BarackObama.com)

Track Record: Obama broke this promise within three days of taking office. He [nominated former Raytheon lobbyist William Lynn](#) as deputy secretary of defense on January 23. Raytheon is a major military contractor for the Pentagon. Four days later, Obama broke his promise again. Obama nominated [Goldman Sachs lobbyist Mark Patterson](#) as chief of staff for Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner on January 27. Goldman Sachs is a major Wall Street bank holding company. After that, everyone pretty much stopped keeping count on how many times Obama broke this promise.

Verdict: Outright Lie

Transparency in Government

Legislative Five-day Online "Sunlight" Pledge

Promise: "SUNLIGHT BEFORE SIGNING: Too often bills are rushed through Congress and to the president before the public has the opportunity to review them. As president, Barack Obama will not sign any non-emergency bill without giving the American public an opportunity to review and comment on the White House website for five days. In addition to ensuring that the public has the ability to review legislation, the sunlight will help ensure that earmarks tucked into appropriations bills are exposed. (["Taking Back Our Government" pamphlet](#) on BarackObama.com)

Track Record: Obama hasn't even tried to keep this promise. The New York Times [observed](#) on June 22, "Five months into his administration, Mr. Obama has signed two dozen bills, but he has almost never waited five days. On the recent credit card legislation, which included a controversial measure to allow guns in national parks, he waited just two."

Verdict: Outright Lie

Limiting "State Secrets" Claims

Promise: "It is no coincidence that the disastrous policies of the Bush-Cheney years have been accompanied by unprecedented secrecy for the American people.... The administration has ignored public disclosure rules and has invoked a legal tool known as the 'state secrets' privilege more than any other previous administration to get cases thrown out of civil court.... As president, Obama will restore the American people's trust in their government by making government more open and transparent." (["Taking Back Our Government" pamphlet](#) on BarackObama.com)

Track Record: Even though the president used an executive order to instruct "all members of his administration to operate under principles of openness, transparency and of engaging citizens with their government," President Obama has used "state secrets" claims with as much abandon as the Bush administration, and typically in the same kind of cases.

ABC News [reported](#) on April 28 that "in the first 100 days, the Obama administration has invoked the state secrets privilege in three cases: Al Haramain Islamic Foundation v. Obama, Mohammed v. Jeppesen Dataplan, and Jewel v. NSA." Senator Russ Feingold, a fellow Democrat, gave Obama a "D" grade on "rule of law" issues at that time, specifically mentioning the state-secrets claims.

Obama's pledge to abandon "state secrets" claims was not categorical, however, as he [noted on the same campaign website](#): "The Obama White House would invoke its executive privilege to protect the confidentiality of communications concerning national security and similar traditionally sensitive matters, not to withhold information about private interests' communication on regulatory policy.

There are communications that should be kept private because disclosure could endanger the public." In each of the above cases, however, the suppression of evidence was related to the torture of detainees, or the illegal and unconstitutional warrantless searches that violated the Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. In other words, the cases didn't involve national security, they involved the coverup of crimes against the U.S. Constitution. The "state secrets" claims also perfectly matched the same Bush administration policy Obama had nominally criticized during the campaign.

Glenn Greenwald of the liberal Salon.com [guessed](#) at the true meaning of Obama's pledge on "state secrets" as early as February 10: "Apparently, the operative word in that highlighted paragraph — unbeknownst to most people at the time — was 'the Bush administration,' since the Obama administration is now doing exactly that which, during the campaign, it defined as 'The Problem,' the only difference being that it is now Obama, and not Bush, doing it." Because Obama's promises weren't categorical, they can't be labeled outright lies. But they were clearly deliberately deceptive.

Verdict: Deceit

Limiting Claims of "Executive Privilege"

Promise: "The American people deserve to know what their government does and why. Ours is an open government, and our ability to understand our government at work — the freedom of information we enjoy — has been copied by other countries around the world. The Freedom of Information Act is a pillar of our open government. Unfortunately, in recent years our government has failed to keep the American people informed about what it was doing and why, and it has refused to provide Americans with information they are entitled to by law. Turning our tradition of free information upside down, the Bush administration has instructed agencies to presume citizens are not entitled to information unless they are willing to sue for it. Barack Obama would restore the tradition of free information by issuing an Executive Order that information should be released unless an agency reasonably foresees harm to a protected interest." (["Taking Back Our Government" pamphlet](#) on BarackObama.com)

Track Record: President Obama has denied Americans access to information even when they have sued to get it. And his spokesmen conspired to mislead the public about the nature of secrets withheld from the public under the "executive privilege" doctrine.

One of the more public examples was the suppression of torture photographs showing instances of abuse and rape of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison. One of America's own generals, recently retired Major General Antonio Taguba, even admitted to the [May 27 London Daily Telegraph](#) that "these pictures show torture,

abuse, rape and every indecency." When America's own generals confirm that the photos document torture and rape, denying it is a pretty tough task.

But the Obama White House did deny it, even as they denied the public access to the photographs. White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs [told reporters at a press briefing the next day](#) that "the article is wrong and mischaracterizes the photos that are in question.... None of the photographs in question depict the images described in the article. Again, I think if you do an even moderate Google search, you're not going to find many of these newspapers and truth within, say, 25 words of each other." The Pentagon came out with another, almost identical, non-categorical denial the same day. "None of the photos in question depict the images that are described in that article," Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman [told the press on May 28](#).

Gibbs and Whitman could instead have simply issued a categorical denial that no photos documented rape and torture. Why did both Gibbs and Whitman use the peculiar phrase "the photos in question" to deny the allegation that American handlers had raped detainees? Because they needed a lawyerly way of claiming they hadn't lied if it were exposed that such photos existed. The very next day (May 29) the Internet magazine Salon.com [reported](#) that U.S. Army Major General Antonio Taguba confirmed that the British newspaper's account of his quote was accurate: "These pictures show torture, abuse, rape and every indecency." Since Taguba had been the two-star general in command of the 2004 Abu Ghraib investigation, he was in a position to see all the suppressed photos.

Once the existence of the photos was exposed and confirmed by the same U.S. general who had conducted the Abu Ghraib investigation, all the White House had to say was they were suppressing an entirely different set of photos from the public. Indeed, Taguba had told Salon he wasn't sure if the photos he had described were among the set that the Obama administration had been seeking to prevent from public disclosure.

However sneaky the deception was, none of it involved an outright lie, because the Obama administration had claimed during the campaign that "the Obama White House would invoke its executive privilege to protect the confidentiality of communications concerning national security and similar traditionally sensitive matters.... There are communications that should be kept private because disclosure could endanger the public." After the photos were suppressed, Obama argued that publishing photos documenting what our top general had already confirmed would have inflamed terrorists against Americans. It was a "national security" issue, Obama claimed, even though Islamic extremists already believed the worst about detention by Americans. Therefore, Obama's promises about "executive privilege" were not outright lies, but they were clearly deliberately deceptive.

Verdict: Deceit

No "Signing Statements" That Undermine the Law

Promise: "Obama will sign legislation in the light of day without attaching signing statements that undermine the legislative intent." (["Taking Back Our Government" pamphlet](#) on BarackObama.com)

Track Record: President Obama issued a signing statement doing just that on June 26, arguing that a bill that established limits on how a \$106 billion loan guarantee to the International Monetary Fund could be issued "would interfere with my constitutional authority to conduct foreign relations by directing the Executive to take certain positions in negotiations or discussions with international organizations and foreign governments." Therefore, Obama [wrote](#), "I will not treat these provisions as limiting my ability to engage in foreign diplomacy or negotiations." Obama's arrogant attack on the legislature's sole authority to appropriate funds and make laws resulted in a near-unanimous rebuke ([429-2 vote](#)) by the U.S. House of Representatives on July 9. And on July 21, four committee chairmen from Obama's own Democratic Party wrote to the president saying they were "chagrined" by his signing statement and urging him to withdraw the assertion.

Verdict: Outright Lie

Fiscal Responsibility

No Middle-class Tax Increase

Promise: "I can make a firm pledge: Under my plan, no family making less than \$250,000 a year will see any form of tax increase, not your income tax, not your payroll tax, not your capital gains taxes, not any of your taxes." (Candidate Obama, at a [campaign speech in Dover, New Hampshire, on September 11, 2008](#))

Track Record: A big part of the reason Obama won the election was his promise not to raise the taxes of middle-class Americans. But President Obama took all of two weeks to break this promise, with his [signing](#) of the ["Children's Health Insurance Program," which doubled the taxes on tobacco](#) (which is mostly consumed by the poorer half of American society). Obama has also pushed an \$840 billion energy tax increase on all Americans from May through July under the [American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009](#). Obama himself has said that the legislation, informally known as "cap and trade," would necessarily ["skyrocket"](#) Americans' utility bills. He is also reputed to be considering a tax increase to pay for his healthcare "reform" package.

Verdict: Outright Lie

Controlling the National Debt

Promise: "Under President Bush, the federal debt has increased from \$5.7

trillion to \$8.8 trillion, an increase of more than 50 percent.... Barack Obama and Joe Biden's Record [is] ... against Raising the Federal Debt Limit: In 2006, Obama voted against misguided Republican efforts to raise the statutory debt limit at the same time the Republicans were pushing through massive debt-financed tax cuts for the wealthy." ([BarackObama.com "Fiscal" page](#))

Track Record: The statutory debt limit under the Bush administration was raised to \$11.3 trillion with passage of the TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) bailout as the Bush administration waned. Had Obama updated his campaign website after the September passage of the TARP legislation, he could have pointed out that the Bush record of fiscal responsibility had actually gotten worse. Perhaps Obama didn't point that out because he had changed sides on the debt issue and voted in favor of (and lobbied for) the TARP legislation increasing the national debt limit. Once he became president, Obama took all of four weeks to continue the Bush policy to increase the statutory debt level with his "[stimulus bill](#)", the so-called American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. That bill, which he signed February 13, increased the statutory debt limit to \$12.1 trillion.

Moreover, President [Obama's fiscal 2010 budget proposal](#) calls for increasing the national debt to \$17.4 trillion by the time he finishes his first term in 2013. Obama's budget calls for \$500 billion or larger deficits every year into the indefinite future.

In sum, Obama plans to add more to the national debt in four years than was added under Bush's eight years. Obama clearly has no real plan for or interest in stemming the wave of deficit spending the country began under Bush, but his campaign literature wasn't an explicit lie. He never made any concrete promises about the debt. Obama's language expressing apparent concern about the public debt was mere throw-away lines for a gullible public.

Verdict: Deceit

No "Pork" Pledge and Stimulus Bill

Promise: "Cut Pork Barrel Spending: Obama introduced and passed bipartisan legislation that would require more disclosure and transparency for special-interest earmarks. Obama and Biden believe that spending that cannot withstand public scrutiny cannot be justified. Obama and Biden will slash earmarks to no greater than year 1994 levels and ensure all spending decisions are open to the public. ([BarackObama.com "Fiscal" page](#))

Track Record: Obama has made no serious effort to control pork barrel spending. "While the number of specific projects declined by 12.5 percent, from 11,610 in fiscal year 2008 to 10,160 in fiscal year 2009," [Citizens Against Government Waste reported in April](#), "the total tax dollars spent to fund them increased by 14 percent, from \$17.2 billion to \$19.6 billion." In Obama's case,

he's transformed the whole nature of pork by making it an executive branch distribution. Obama's marquis legislation, the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (a.k.a. the "stimulus" law), is a prime example. Obama claimed in his June 23 press conference that the "stimulus" had worked because "we know for a fact that states, for example, would have laid off a lot more teachers, a lot more police officers, a lot more firefighters, every single one of those individuals whose jobs were saved." Of course, teacher and government employee unions were among the key contributors to his presidential campaign. What "worked" was the political payback, and Obama brought pork dollars back to his voters just as local congressmen try to bring pork dollars back to their voters.

The "stimulus" is loaded with lots of more-obvious pork barrel projects, of which these are a few of the flagrant examples:

- CBSNews.com [reported](#) \$1.1 billion in "stimulus" funding for rural airports on July 13, including ridiculous appropriations such as: "Purdue University Airport got \$800,000 to help keep animals off the runway. That's even though they've reported just one incident: a plane ran over a skunk in 1996. In Alaska, \$15 million went to build a bigger, better airport for the town of Ouzinkie — population just 165. That's roughly \$90,000 dollars per resident."
- The *Washington Times* [reported](#) on July 9 that "\$16.1 million from the stimulus program is going to save the San Francisco Bay area habitat of, among other things, the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse." The area just happens to abut the congressional district of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.
- Citizens Against Government Waste [reported](#) a "stimulus" award in Democratic Senator Robert Byrd's West Virginia: "Paul Turman, West Virginia's assistant transportation secretary, said the \$21 million in stimulus money will connect two unfinished stretches of the superhighway at the midpoint of the route. The State Division of Highways said the money will create 60 jobs lasting between 18 and 24 months, which works out to \$175,000 in taxpayer dollars a year for each job created." Senator Byrd is known inside the Washington, D.C., beltway as the "Prince of Pork" for his billions of dollars in pork earmarks.

Obama's pledge to cut pork didn't come true. But just about every politician pledges to cut it and doesn't. The difference is that the president really can't stop a determined Congress in passing pork. Congress will always have the power to slip some of its favorite pork into a must-pass bill. But Obama still wins a mark for "deceit" for claiming he could fix it, as well as for expanding it within the executive branch decision-making process.

Verdict: Deceit

Cut Government Spending

Promise: "Obama's plan will cut taxes overall, reducing revenues to below the levels that prevailed under Ronald Reagan (less than 18.2 percent of GDP). The Obama tax plan is a net tax cut — his tax relief for middle class families is larger than the revenue raised by his tax changes for families over \$250,000. Coupled with his commitment to cut unnecessary spending, Obama will pay for this tax relief while bringing down the budget deficit." ([BarackObama.com "Taxes" page](#)) See also ([for more details](#))

Track Record: While candidate Obama promised overall spending cuts and lower tax revenues, President [Obama's fiscal 2010 budget proposal](#) would increase spending by a third and increase taxes by half before the next presidential election. Even assuming his unrealistically optimistic economic growth projections (already proven too optimistic by the history of the past six months), Obama would keep government spending in the 22-23 percent range of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Obama never even proposed, let alone fought for, bringing taxes back to Reagan-era levels.

Verdict: Outright Lie

Healthcare-cost Promises

Promise: "Under the [healthcare] plan, if you like your current health insurance, nothing changes, except your costs will go down by as much as \$2,500 per year.... Barack Obama will pay for his \$50-\$65 billion health care reform effort by rolling back the Bush tax cuts for Americans earning more than \$250,000 per year and retaining the estate tax at its 2009 level." ([BarackObama.com "Health Care" page](#))

Track Record: Obama's healthcare package would cost at least [\\$1 trillion in new spending over 10 years](#), according to the Congressional Budget Office. Most or all of that figure would be increased costs, not cost savings. That's several times the meaningless overall cost figure Obama put into his campaign literature. As it stands in Congress right now, Obamacare would increase the deficit by at least \$219 billion, [assuming that the House version with its massive \\$581 billion tax increase on taxpayers is included in the measure](#). Obama's "plan" on his campaign website listed no comprehensive numbers, other than the absurd \$50-65 billion costs listed above. Currently, there is no healthcare plan from the Obama administration or congressional Democrats under public discussion that would cut costs to the American consumer. Every plan would increase the cost to the American consumers between \$800 billion and \$1 trillion through either debt or taxes. That's an increase in cost to the average consumer of about \$2,500, the same figure he promised to cut. You simply can't honestly claim to add 47 million people to the government

healthcare rolls and then state you'll cut overall taxpayer costs through cutting "waste." While it's possible Obama could have honestly mistaken some figures, there's no way he could have honestly promised the cost cuts he did and ended up with the increased-cost plans currently under consideration by Congress.

Verdict: Outright Lie

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The initial tally of Obama's honesty in fulfilling his campaign promises to middle America is eight outright lies and four instances of deliberate deceit. That's hardly an encouraging start for President Obama. Americans should remember his pledges and his poor honesty record. As the old saying goes, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me!"