

***"THE DECIDER" TRIES TO REWRITE HISTORY ON SUPPORT OF VETERANS --
Joseph L. Galloway: "His actions and those of his crony appointees toward our
veterans is a blot on our consciences."***

**I'M THE
DECIDER!**

AT LONG LAST, SIR, HAVE YOU LEFT

NO SENSE OF DECENCY?

***By Joseph L. Galloway
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Even as President George W. Bush was packing up his knick-knacks and calling for the moving van, the White House spin machine was whirring along at Warp 6, doing its best to put a happy face on the sorry history of his eight years in the Oval Office.

The campaign is intended to write a first draft of history and thus forestall an inevitable judgment that the Bush presidency has made the presidencies of Ulysses S. Grant, Warren G. Harding and Herbert Hoover look good by comparison.

His acolytes cling to a fading hope that historians somehow will treat him much more kindly 20 or 30 years down the road, as they have Harry S. Truman. If historians only worked from White House press releases, that dream might have a chance.

The baggage Bush will carry home to Dallas and Crawford weighs a lot more than his boxes of presidential tchotchkes. The baggage he leaves behind for an incoming President Barack Obama and the nation is backbreaking.

The White House spinners have moved past mere distortion of the facts into plain old lying.

Take, for a prime example, two press releases titled "Highlights of Accomplishments and Results of the Administration of George W. Bush" and "100 Things Americans May Not Know About the Bush Administration Record."

Take for just one specific example the claim that this administration provided unprecedented resources for veterans over the last eight years and, they say, more support than any other president in our history.

Say it ain't so, Joe.

OK: It isn't so. It isn't true. It's a bald-faced lie.

Those who try to rewrite history credit Bush with increasing veterans' benefits and transforming veterans' health care. They claim that he instituted reforms in the care of wounded soldiers coming home from his wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and expanded resources for mental health services for troops coming home with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBI).

The truth is that Congress passed virtually every bill to spend more money on benefits for veterans over the opposition of the Bush administration. Reforms in the care of wounded soldiers came only after The Washington Post exposed the shameful warehousing of the recovering wounded at Walter Reed Army Hospital, less than five miles from the Oval Office.

Even as the Iraq War dragged on and the numbers of severely wounded troops began rising sharply, Bush's Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson, a former Republican National Committee chairman, was up on Capitol Hill delivering a budget with cuts in health-care staffing at VA and cuts in nursing home care.

Nicholson, on White House orders, blocked four congressional attempts to streamline the VA's handling of a disgraceful six-month backlog in veterans benefit claims -- a backlog that's only grown worse in subsequent years.

With its eyes on maintaining public support for Bush's war in Iraq, and not on those it sent to fight it, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's Pentagon pressured the Army and Marines to discharge their wounded as fast as possible with the lowest possible disability ratings.

As a result, those who had borne the battle were abandoned to the dysfunctional VA health-care system, in which it takes six months just to get into the system and a month or more to get a doctor's appointment.

The Bush administration grossly underestimated the flood of post-traumatic stress disorder cases coming home from combat and, when confronted with the reality of more than 320,000 new veterans suffering from PTSD, major depression and TBI, it did little or nothing to expedite their care. In fact, of the 84,000 new veterans diagnosed with PTSD, only half, or 42,000 have managed to get their disability claims approved by the VA.

Some veterans committed suicide while they awaited medical and financial help, itself evidence of the abject and disgraceful failure of the system, and the nation and the administration of George W. Bush. The VA responded by understating the numbers of veterans' suicides and then covering it up. Only after a veterans group sued it did the VA establish a suicide hotline. A heckuva job.

Bush proposed a half-percent increase in the VA budget for fiscal 2006 after his own appointees at the agency told Congress that they needed a 13 percent increase to meet -- barely -- the urgent needs for medical and mental health care for the wounded coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

While the budget scrimped on care for our troops, the administration somehow found room for \$3.8 million in performance bonuses for the top executives of an agency that was failing to do its job and fulfill our obligation to those who served and suffered.

In 2007, Bush threatened to veto a bill to boost VA spending by 10 percent, or \$3.2 billion. He said that was too expensive and countered with an offer of 2 percent. After Congress

passed the bill almost unanimously, Republicans included, The Decider decided to swallow it and signed the bill.

His actions and those of his crony appointees toward our veterans is a blot on our consciences. To then turn around, as the door is about to hit them in their butts on their way out, and take credit for their "good work" on behalf of those they neglected is reprehensible.

Decent people would be tortured by their consciences, but these people apparently have none, and they have no shame, either.

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