

Built on a foundation of lies

We all know political speech is rhetorical—designed to fire up support. Most political speeches are short on substance and long on promises. This is true for any party, any politician. But how often do you see a political speech that is made up of misrepresentation and falsehoods? Indeed, of outright lies? Look no farther than Paul Ryan's speech at the Republican National Convention last night. The fact checkers have been having a field day, and everyone is saying the same thing: the speech is full of lies. For example, Talking Points Memo lists the 6 Worst Lies in Paul Ryan's Speech. Even a blogger for Fox News calls the speech deceiving (although I have been told the blogger is a progressive pundit with the otherwise conservative news outlet h/t to Brad Phillips).

But we are all fact checkers now.

How can you trust a politician who lies so blatantly and yet so earnestly? (Yes, I know, most politicians lie.) It's like the bigwigs at the GOP are not aware that millions of people, all with access to the Internet, can quickly look things up, comment instantaneously and amplify the response.

Is it an echo chamber?

On the other hand, perhaps those of us tweeting and sharing articles like the one above are really in an echo chamber. We are all talking to ourselves. The party faithful out there think Paul Ryan gave a great speech! He promised that Mitt Romney will show strong leadership, and protect Medicare (even though Romney has shown very little leadership and Ryan's plan actually decimates both Medicare and Medicaid).

What happened to Medicaid?

Actually, you will notice that the RNC is focused on MEDICARE. Why? Because Medicare is the government-sponsored health

insurance plan for SENIORS. There are a lot of seniors in Florida (where the convention is being held) and seniors vote. But Romney and Ryan are not talking at all about Medicaid, which is government-sponsored health insurance for poor people. But then again, Mitt Romney has already said he is not concerned about the very poor in this country.

Did you build that?

And of course, the other deceitful thing going on at the RNC convention is the “we did build it” trope—which is based on a statement (perhaps unadvised) by President Obama about small businesses needing the support of government to succeed—that has been taken out of context.

All in all, something built on a weak foundation—and lies are weak—generally falls down on itself. But the question is unless someone points out a lie, do you know it? And more importantly, do the voters going to the polls in November have real, factual, proven information on which to make a decision?

Truth should be as important as presentation.

When people praise Paul Ryan’s speech as being good—what are they saying? And if a speech can be good even though it is built on a foundation of lies, where does that leave us and our democracy?

Speech is powerful

We've all heard that sticks and stones can break your bones but words can't. Words may not break bones but they can be a call to action that could result in broken bones. Speech can be powerful. As many PR/marketing practitioners know, writing a speech can be one of the most difficult tasks. You want to get across a message, while maintaining a tone that resonates with the audience. You have to choose words carefully and you have to use humor judiciously. In short, it's a difficult task. But a good speech and more importantly, a well delivered speech can really sway minds.

I had the privilege of listening to Barack Obama speak this morning. He's a fantastic orator. I also heard John McCain speak on Monday. Obama is a stronger speaker than McCain, and that is something that can't be underestimated. This contest will really come down to the power of speech because a good speech can certainly influence opinion. President Reagan was known for his speaking abilities and I would say that is what won him the presidency and kept him there through two terms. George Bush is not known for being a good speaker. Yes, he won the presidency but he won against Kerry, who is certainly not a good speaker. Gore also was known as sounding very wooden. So the bottom line is that it is important what you say (this is where the speechwriters earn their money) but how you say it can make all the difference.