

Liberty to Lie

By CHARLES M. BLOW

This election may go down in history as the moment when truth and lies lost their honor and stigma, respectively.

Mitt Romney has demonstrated an uncanny, unflinching willingness to say anything and everything to win this election. And that person, the unprincipled prince of untruths, is running roughly even with or slightly ahead of the president in the national polls.

What does this say about our country? What does it say about the value of virtue?

The list of Romney's out-and-out lies (and yes, there is no other more polite word for them) is too long to recount here. So let's just take one of the most recent ones: the utterly false claim that General Motors and Chrysler shipped, or planned to ship, American auto jobs to China.

First, let's take on the Chrysler claim.

On Saturday, The Des Moines Register endorsed Mitt Romney because it thought that he would be "the stronger candidate" to forge "compromises in Congress." On Tuesday, the news side of that same publication fact-checked Romney's Chrysler-China claim and found that it was a lie.

According to the Register:

Mitt Romney first told a crowd in Ohio on Thursday that Chrysler was shifting the production of Jeeps to China. Then he aired an ad claiming that President Obama "sold Chrysler to Italians who are going to build Jeeps in China." (The clear impression in the ad is that American jobs will be lost.) Neither is true.

The paper continued:

Jeep sales have nearly tripled since 2009, according to Chrysler, and the company has added 4,600 jobs to its Jeep plants since then. Another 1,100 jobs will be added at an Ohio plant next year. Sales of Jeep in China have grown in recent years and Chrysler plans to resume vehicle production there, but not at the expense of American jobs.

Now on to GM. The Romney ad claims that "under President Obama, GM cut 15,000 American jobs, but they are planning to double the number of cars built in China, which means 15,000 more jobs for China."

This drew a sharp rebuke from GM:

We've clearly entered some parallel universe during these last few days. No amount of campaign politics at its cynical worst will diminish our record of creating jobs in the U.S. and repatriating profits back to this country.

Factcheck.org went into more detail to disprove Romney's claim:

The Romney radio ad also claims — correctly — that GM has cut 15,000 U.S. jobs under Obama. It's true that 13,000 U.S. hourly employees and 5,000 salaried workers accepted a buyout offer in 2009 to either retire early or voluntarily leave the company, according to GM's 2009 annual filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The Web site continued:

But those numbers don't tell the whole story. GM eliminated old brands and shuttered dealerships when it went through bankruptcy in 2009 — resulting in fewer jobs. The alternative was to go out of business entirely.

And made one further point:

The radio ad goes on to falsely claim that the reduction in GM's U.S. payroll "means 15,000 more jobs for China." That's not true. As we wrote once before, GM is expanding operations in China to meet increased demand there for its vehicles. The increase in its China operations is unrelated to its U.S. operations.

Romney wouldn't acknowledge the truth if it kissed him on the cheek. In fact, Romney seems to have decided that the only things standing between him and the White House are stubborn facts. He continues to roll right over them.

The question is: will this scurrilous tactic have negative consequences?

Unfortunately, there is some evidence that facts and the people who check them don't carry the same weight that they once did.

First, the right's disinformation machine is, explicitly and implicitly, making the argument that facts (science, math, evidence) are fungible and have been co-opted by liberal eggheads. They have declared war on facts in response to what they claim is a liberal war on faith.

This is an utterly false and ridiculous argument, but it works on some people.

According to a Quinnipiac University/New York Times/CBS News Swing State poll released Wednesday, President Obama has a 9 percentage point lead over Romney in Ohio among likely voters on the question of who is honest and trustworthy (most people thought that the president was honest while most would not say the same about Romney). But that same poll found that the president only had a 5-point lead in the horse race numbers in Ohio.

The president had a similarly large lead on the honesty question in Florida and in Virginia, but in those states the poll found the race to be virtually tied — the president had a small lead that was within the margin of error.

How is it that so many people are willing to support a man who they don't believe is honest or trustworthy?

The poll also found that most voters didn't believe that Romney cared about their problems. On the other hand, at least 60 percent of voters in each state said that they believed that the president cared about their problems.

Who votes for a man who doesn't care about you over a man who does?

I recognize that Obama hatred is a real thing, but disliking the president so much that you would do harm to yourself by voting for someone who you admit you don't trust seems to be taking things to extremes.

All the voters who are aware of Romney's fact-mangling but vote for him anyway must ask themselves this question: are they granting him the liberty to lie?
