

**THE BLOG**

The Ministry of Truthiness Vets the SOTU Text

By Marty Kaplan

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According to a New York Times story filed Monday night, White House officials said that Bush's State of the Union speech "was still being fact-checked."

"*Fact-checked*"? I'm trying to get my mind around what that means to this White House.

Obviously, it can't mean a process that would have excluded the tall tales about WMDs that Ahmed Chalabi & Co spun. A CIA or NSC or State or Energy red flag about, say, yellowcake, surely isn't enough to make something unafacty; I think you must need at least five Federal agencies unanimously saying something's not so in order to get it stricken from the draft.

It can't mean culling stuff that the nonpartisan Congressional Research Office or the career lawyers at Justice say is bogus. If it did, then warrantless wiretaps and torture would have to be called illegal. I guess the standard must be that at least three of the President's own political appointees must agree that something is unlawfulish for it to get a second look before making it into the speech.

It can't mean being ok'd by economists not on the Federal payroll. If it did, then none of that feel-good talk about the Bush tax cuts boosting business investment or spreading wealth to the middle class would ever make it to the podium.

It can't mean getting a signoff from scientists. It's simply not enough for a climate scientist like the director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies to say that smokestack and tailpipe emissions cause global warming. If there's an energy industry-funded "think tank" out there that says "more research is needed," then that must be enough to torpedo what some pesky scientist says.

So the question remains: where do the White House fact-checkers set the bar? Here's my best guess: if it's something that the President's already said; or something that he believes in his heart to be true; or something that people who think the President is the most brilliant person they've ever met believe *should* be true, then it deserves to get the Ministry of Truthiness's official seal of approval.

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