

**THE BLOG**

# The Truths Rove Told

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By Marty Kaplan

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While it's tempting to truth-squad the lies and smears that Karl Rove's been spreading during his infamy lap, let's focus instead on the truths.

Sure, it's natural to want to focus on the disinformation he's still retailing (like, Joe Wilson lied in his *New York Times* op-ed), but it's hardly surprising that the mother of all talking points realizes he can keep getting away with the Big Lie as long as journalists remain too musk-awed to follow up. Yes, it's seductive to speculate about the politics of his seven-point attack on Hillary Clinton's health care record (is it a typical Rovian assault on her strength in order to hurt her? a reverse psychology triple-Lutz to hurt Obama?), and perfectly understandable to want to psychoanalyze his referring to Sen. Clinton as "this woman." But instead of deconstructing his deceptions and psyching out his psy-ops, let's look at the truths he told.

On *Meet the Press*, Rove told David Gregory that Republicans lost control of the House in 2006 because of only 85,000 votes out of 82 million cast, and that they lost control of the Senate because of only 3,562 votes out of 60 million cast. (Rove could also have pointed out, but didn't, that Bush might have lost the White House in 2004 if 59,300 Ohioans had voted the other way, and he might have never had won the Electoral College in the first place if all of Florida's popular votes had actually been recounted.) This is, to be sure, The New Math; Rove's Old Math had Republicans holding Congress in 2006, but what's a little revisionism among pols.

Rove's keen awareness of the minuscule margins in recent elections is, of course, what led to his attempts to rig the voting pool, from demanding that US Attorneys file fraudulent indictments, to "caging" and then intimidating voters at the polls. But what does The Math mean to us? What does it mean for American democracy that something like one tenth of one percentage point of the electorate decides whether we sacrifice even more lives in a senseless war, or tolerate even further erosion of our civil liberties, or continue to entrust the Constitution to right-wing theocrats and delusional empire builders?

Yes, I know that the Democratic Congress elected in 2006 has too often failed the spine test, and I realize that even a filibuster- and veto-proof Democratic Congress, coupled with a Democratic White House, is no guarantee that the bond market, the blue dogs, the triangulators, the corporate lobbyists, the DLC, the Lieberman corner, and the "bipartisan" let-by-gones-be-by-gones commentariat caucus won't have their tentacles all over the inheritors of a decisive 2008 victory. Nor does it mean that the right-wing echo chamber will be any less ferocious in its attacks, nor

that the old media will be any less supine in its admiration for propaganda techniques proven effective long ago by fascists. But short of a third party victory, which I don't think is in the cards, or violent revolution, which I hope is not on the horizon, the only way to change the country's direction is to decisively beat The Math in which half the country doesn't vote, and in which rural voters are disproportionately powerful.

So how to get a Murdoch- and McConnell-proof victory? My money is on turnout — especially on efforts to register young people, like [DeclareYourself.com](#). At the end of Rove's *Meet the Press* stint, Gregory showed a clip of young Karl leading the College Republicans for Nixon charge in 1972. "It was a fun time," Rove told Gregory, reflecting on the period others recall as Watergate and Vietnam. Rove's goal in 1972, as he said in the clip, was to get 18- to 21-year-old Americans to register. His strategy: train others in that same age group to convince their peers to get in the game. "You can't get a 35-year-old to get a young person to register," he said in 1972; "young people have got to reach other young people."

I'm guessing Rove was right then, and right now. But here's the problem: Young people are the least well-informed of all American cohorts. This year, when the Pew Center polled Americans about their basic knowledge of government, politics and current events, the group that scored worst — the ones who flunked most egregiously — were aged 18 to 29. It's comforting that a *New York Times* poll says that this same age group is decisively Democratic, but I can't help worrying that their underlying lack of civic knowledge makes them sitting ducks for whatever the Limbaugh-Coulter-Malkin machine throws at them in 2008.

You have to know what the Constitution says in order to realize that Rove is lying when *he* says, as he did this past weekend, that Congressional oversight of the Executive Branch is unconstitutional. You have to know that Iraq contains Sunnis and Shiia at war with one another in order to recognize that Rove's claim on *Meet the Press* that "9/11 changed everything" does not change the 15 centuries of intra-Islamic strife that created the shooting gallery into which Rove's President keeps sending Americans to die.

It's not enough to support, as 62 percent of young Americans do, a universal, government-sponsored national health care insurance program. They also need to care at least as much about voting for the next American President as about voting for the next *American Idol*. They need to know the difference between the characters Fred Thompson played in the movies and on TV, and the character he displayed as a Washington lobbyist. They need to know the difference between the 9/11 bullhorn bullshit of Bush and Giuliani, and the neocon counter-terrorism crusaders whose signal achievement has been uniting and inflaming the Muslim world against us.

Like Rove, I think young people can best convince other young people to register. Like Rove, I believe that a sliver of strategically-placed voters can make a huge difference in the outcome of the next election. And like Rove, I think the election can be "a fun time," too. Just not for him.

And don't get me started on Diebold.

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