

The Washington Times

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Reality denial

By Richard W. Rahn

Published May 10, 2004

If you ask anyone with the most casual knowledge of baseball which team won the most World Series games in the last 80 years, the Chicago Cubs or the New York Yankees, you would expect to get the right answer at least 90 percent of the time. Even diehard Cubs fans would tell you it was the Yankees because they would not want to appear ignorant.

As with baseball, knowledgeable people normally give correct answers to questions even though they might prefer a different answer. The exception to this rule is political history and public policy, where all too many knowledgeable people feel free to say things contrary to empirical evidence -- and often do so without embarrassment.

Current examples are many political commentators, as well as elected politicians, who frequently say the country went from surplus to deficit because of the Bush tax cuts.

The deficit actually was caused by a large increase in government spending (voted for by majorities of both parties), which began at the end of the Clinton administration, and the recession was under way when President Bush took office.

The tax rate reductions are only a minor part of the deficit, and the country would be in deficit with or without the tax changes. The numbers are easy to come by, so there is no excuse for commentators to make incorrect statements. What would happen to a sports reporter who consistently gave incorrect baseball statistics?

Recently, I listened to a well-educated reporter whom I happen to know and who was speaking on an NPR show. He claimed it was not proven Alger Hiss, who was a high-ranking State Department official in the 1940s, had been a spy and implied Hiss got a bum rap because of the "right wing."

The fact is Hiss was fairly convicted, and several serious researchers have shown the evidence against him was overwhelming. When the KGB files were finally opened at the end of the Cold War, they showed that indeed Hiss was a Soviet spy. Yet, many on the American left still cling to the myth of his innocence, despite the evidence.

Such individuals have no more credibility than Holocaust deniers, yet the news media treated them as serious people.

Another common myth is that increasing the minimum wage can raise real incomes without increasing unemployment. Such assertions defy economic logic and endless empirical studies.

Yet advocates of higher minimum wages engage in reality denial without challenge from those who should know better. One of these higher minimum wage advocates appeared on the "Dennis Miller" show a week ago. Fortunately, Mr. Miller had the wit to say he favored a \$200,000 a year minimum wage, implicitly noting the fallacy in his guest's argument.

Many on the left created the myth Ronald Reagan was a mental lightweight. Some have continued to repeat this nonsense in the face of overwhelming evidence Mr. Reagan was a serious political thinker who himself wrote and researched more policy commentaries, papers and speeches than any other recent president. When he studied economics in college, Mr. Reagan was regarded as gifted with an exceptional memory.

From 1975 to 1979, Mr. Reagan gave more than 1,000 daily radio broadcasts, two-thirds of which he wrote himself, covering a very wide range of topics.

For those who may doubt Mr. Reagan's intellect, I suggest you read "Reagan, In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan that Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America," by Ronald Reagan, Annelise and Martin Anderson, et al. Those who continue to argue Mr. Reagan was a dummy, despite the evidence, reveal more about themselves than their target.

The most persistent public policy myth is that socialism is a form of economic organization superior to free market, democratic capitalism. Virtually every form of socialism conceivable by the mind of man has been tried somewhere during the last 200 years -- and all have ultimately failed.

There were the socialists of the French Revolution, the early American and English utopians, the Marxists and the Fascists (who managed to murder more than 100 million of their own citizens), the Fabians and the social democrats.

Though these various forms of socialism always resulted in economic stagnation or worse, many still proudly proclaim themselves socialists. American academics and politicians continue praising Fidel Castro, or even Josef Stalin, on TV and are treated with respect by their weak-minded hosts.

Again, what would we do with a sports reporter who was no more factual about athletic accomplishment than the academics, commentators and politicians who espouse the aforementioned nonsense? We would give him no air time otherwise laugh at him, or shun him, and certainly not pay him.

People are entitled to their own opinions but not their own facts. Perhaps it is time for those who care about accuracy and standards to start shunning those who don't.

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