

The Art of the Lie

by Julian Sereno

Lies are flying these days, openly and obviously as never before. So much so that it is now the subject of a national conversation. Whether it is considered criminal or disgraceful, or disregarded as mere hyperbole, or accepted as a strategic necessity, depends on who's doing the lying.

For example, it's perfectly acceptable and legal for police or prosecutors to lie to suspects or even the general public if they believe it will help convict the guilty or protect the public at large. However for any individual to lie to law enforcement is a felony that draws hard time. Just the other week, the hapless friend of the repulsive murderer Dylan Roof was sentenced to more than two years for lying to the FBI.

Prevaricating politicians are famous for breaking campaign promises, and there is nothing illegal about it. At worst, they won't get reelected. That can change if a politician, or anyone else for that matter, lies under oath.

President Trump has taken lying to a new level. He made his entrée into the world of politics by promulgating the birther lie -- that Obama was born in Kenya and thus an illegitimate president. Throughout the campaign, Trump lied so frequently and indiscriminately that his lies contradicted one another. I never knew if it was part of some cunning strategy or if he was just a credulous old man who believes the same fake news as his followers.

The newest, biggest lie to date has been his accusation that Obama tapped his phones in Trump Tower. He tweeted during the wee hours as it became clear that many of Trump's senior campaign aids had extensive dealings with the

Russians. His National Security Advisor, Michael Flynn, was forced to resign for lying about contact with Russian officials. Richard Sessions, his Attorney General, was forced to recuse himself from the Justice Department's investigation into contact between Russian officials and the Trump campaign when it turned out he lied under oath during his confirmation hearings. He testified that he had no contact with any Russian officials during the campaign and was subsequently outed by the Washington Post for having met with the Russian ambassador three times since September.

Trump's gambit initially paid off as it changed the conversation away from the Russians and the Trump Campaign working hand in hand. But then the denials started to pour in. Obama officials denounced it. None of his aides had any evidence; FBI Director James Comey testified that there was no evidence whatsoever to support Trump's charges. Even a staunch supporter like NC Sen. Richard Burr said that there was no evidence of any wiretapping. When Trump suggested the British Secret Service tapped his phones on behalf of Obama, they characterized his charges as "ridiculous." This lie is blowing up in Trump's face, despite the best efforts of his loyal stooge, Congressman Devin Nunes (R-CA) to give him cover.

Trump will face no legal consequences for his lie. His core supporters are unfazed, and Presidential lying is legal, as long as it isn't under oath. Which brings up our Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, who did lie under oath. He can sleep easy as long as the Republicans control the Executive Branch and both Houses of Congress. But that could change, and the Statute of Limitations for Federal Perjury charges is 5 years. Anybody for chanting, "Lock him up!"

The only one to lose his job so far on account of lying is Michael Flynn. He made the mistake of lying to Trump through his proxy, Vice President Pence.

It's OK to lie to the American people, to lie to Congress after you've taken oath on a Bible to tell the truth. Just don't lie to Trump.

Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line.