P.S. to the NEWS
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MAJOR MISTAKES AND MINOR MISTAKES

Now that Ronald Reagan is the clear front-runner for the Republican Presidential nomination, an orchestrated campaign to destroy him has begun in earnest.

The charge that he is too old has not dented his popularity in the face of his youthful appearance, energetic campaigning, naturally-dark hair, and beautiful younger wife. The charge that he is too conservative isn't hurting either; the mood of the voters has shifted so dramatically that they may be even more conservative than Reagan.

So the anti-Reagan consortium has devised a new attack: Reagan has used statistical or factual errors in his speeches, and he isn't knowledgeable enough on every issue to be President. These charges have been solemnly reported in extra-long segments of prime-time network television news and on the front pages of important establishment newspapers.

The anti-Reagan media pose the question, "Does Ronald Reagan know what he's talking about?" and then answers it by citing a catalogue of alleged mistakes. He told about HEW arrogance in a local school in Bellingham, Washington when it really happened in Bellevue, Washington. He cited a GAO report listing $11 billion of waste and fraud in government and couldn't produce the study (although he did produce an HEW study admitting $7 billion of fraud and waste in HEW alone). He said we should deploy the MX mobile missile faster than the Carter "race-track" plan, but couldn't say what the faster alternative should be.

It is unlikely that the voters will be impressed by this new attack. The voters know that HEW has been obnoxiously interfering with schools in almost every community, from Washington State to Florida. You don't have to be a GAO accountant to know that the fraud and waste in the $500+ billion federal budget is tremendous and pervasive, and that $11 is most probably a very low estimate.

A nationn's leader in time of crisis is not, and should not be, chosen on the

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basis of intellect, memory for minutiae, or statistical skill. Those are low on the list of talents which leadership requires.

At the time of the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson was clearly the leading intellect, but he was not chosen by his peers to lead our struggling nation in war or to launch our infant nation in peace. George Washington was the undisputed leader because he had the qualities of leadership which could, in the modern idiom, get it all together, and would inspire, sustain, and persevere against insurmountable odds.

The issue today is whether we will build the weapons necessary to restore our military superiority such as the B-1 bomber and the MX missile, not whether the MX is deployed with the "race-track" system or some faster or better alternative. The decision to build is the function of the President; how to implement that decision will be the function of his staff after he is elected.

The Kennedy candidacy is a good lesson to those who are trying to cut down Reagan by their ballyhooed expose of Reagan's picayunish errors. Despite Carter's grievous mistakes and misstatements of massive magnitude, he has been able to defeat Kennedy in most of the primaries primarily because Kennedy is perceived by the voters as "untrustworthy" (the code word for Chappaquiddick).

The same media hobgoblins who are now trying to hold Reagan's feet to the fire of literal and statistical perfection allow their favorites to get by with grievous errors (or lies) which were or are so gigantic that they imperil the survival of our country. We did not see, for example, any prime-time television exposing the crucial contradictions in Defense Secretary Harold Brown's sworn testimony to the Senate last December. At a public hearing, Brown said, "We retain an approximate equality [with the Russians] of military power." In secret testimony, he said just the opposite: "The United States has already slipped into a position of relative inferiority in the areas of strategic nuclear forces and theater nuclear forces."

Mistakes are embarrassing and great pains should be taken by every public figure to avoid them. But all mistakes are not of the same importance. The voters will decide in November whether they want a President who makes major mistakes or one who may make very minor ones.

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