Explaining Clinton's High Poll Numbers

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It's obvious from the torrent of news stories and TV talking heads that no one in the media, not even his friends, believes Bill Clinton's denials that he had an improper relationship with Monica Lewinsky. The pleas of his friends to come forward and "tell us, Mr. President, what really happened so we can put this episode behind us" are phony because the truth is sure to be more embarrassing than the denials.

People and pundits are mystified about the high ratings Clinton still receives in the polls, especially among women. My own unscientific survey of women convinces me that those high numbers consist of some very different segments.

First, there are the diehard Clintonites of whom Eleanor Clift is the prototype. Second are the women (and there seem to be many of them) who will tolerate everything from infidelity to abuse from a charming playboy who pretends to "feel your pain."

Third, we have the radical feminists whose double standard about whom they accuse of sexual harassment is notorious. Fourth are the women who just don't want to hear the explicit details because they are so embarrassing to hear on television and explain to their children.

Other segments of Clinton's majority in public opinion polls include those who believe that private lives should not be the public's business. Some modernists think adultery is not a sin any more, while others concede that adultery is a sin but don't want to think our President is guilty, so it's better to lie about it.

Then, we have to factor in those who just don't care about the scandal one way or the other because the economy is booming. But that doesn't refute the fact that, bottom line, everyone suspects Clinton is lying.

Do Presidents' private lives really matter? Indeed, they matter very much. A man who has convinced himself that it's acceptable to lie about adultery, not only to the public but to those closest to him, can

rationalize lying about other things, too.

Marvin Olasky has written about how the sanctimoniously proper Woodrow Wilson successfully concealed an adulterous relationship while running for New Jersey Governor as a candidate of private and public integrity. That made it easy for him to run for President in 1916 using the slogan "He kept us out of war" while secretly plotting to put us in World War I.

Franklin Roosevelt used the same techniques to cover up his adulterous affairs that he used to cover up affairs of state. He ran for office in 1932 promising to reduce the size and budget of government, while planning the unprecedented expansion of government under the New Deal.

Roosevelt clinched his third term with this ringing declaration, given on October 30, 1940: "Mothers and fathers of America ... I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again -- your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars." All the time, he was secretly scheming to involve us in World War II.

The enormous gulf between John F. Kennedy's public image and private immorality made it easy for him to run for President on the lie that the Eisenhower Administration had inflicted us with a "missile gap." Kennedy's private sex life made it easy to continue his many lies and coverups, including those about the Bay of Pigs fiasco and his plots to assassinate Castro.

Probably some portion of the high poll numbers Clinton is basking in today include people who believe Clinton's behavior is reprehensible but surmise that politicians of both parties are guilty. Since there is really nothing new about Clinton's infidelities and lies, many were mystified about why Republican candidate Bob Dole didn't raise the character issue in 1996.

After the election, reporters revealed that Dole had had a long extra-marital affair while he was still married to his first wife. Dole was ideologically checkmated because he knew that reporters knew his secret and would reveal it if he criticized Clinton's character.

The latest outrageous Clinton scandal, lies, coverup, and obstruction of justice may not be enough to chase him out of office. But they can have one good effect if Congressional Republicans would understand that lies are his political as well as personal way of life, and therefore all his programs should be rejected.

All Clinton's State of the Union spending proposals are built on a pedestal of prevarications. His proposed takeover of baby-sitting would do nothing good for babies or their parents, but just build a new bureaucracy and entitlement.

His proposal to put 55-year-olds into Medicare would raise false hopes, be totally fiscally unsound, and bankrupt Medicare a few years sooner than otherwise. His patients' "bill of rights" proposals would do nothing to improve health care, but would be another giant step toward his goal of nationalized medicine.

Clinton's education proposals would be a zero for academic improvement, but would tighten the federal noose around the local classroom. His proposals for campaign reform are a farce; what we need most of all is for the Clinton campaign to obey current laws.

The most important response Congressional Republicans should make to the scandals is to say, "Sorry, Mr. President. We don't believe you, we don't trust you, and we're going to legislate our own programs, not yours."