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Liberal Columnist Alter Commandeers Newsweek Cover Story; Bashes Bush, Business and Tax Cuts

Disguising Liberal Views as Straight News

Normally, Jonathan Alter spews his liberal views in his signature “Between the Lines” column in *Newsweek*, reserving a few choice nuggets for his “Conventional Wisdom” box in the front of the magazine. Of course, it’s not biased for a liberal to espouse liberal views in a column.

But Alter, a *Newsweek* Senior Editor, also crosses the line and writes news pieces that are heavily skewed by his liberal assumptions. In the current (July 29) issue, Alter shares the byline with chief political correspondent Howard Fineman, and the piece is chock full of liberal opinions. Does anyone recall reading a *Newsweek* news article with conservative George F. Will’s byline?

Newsweek’s “Like Father, Like Son” cover package ostensibly compares and contrasts the circumstances of the two President Bushes. (The magazine’s insight: both Bushes were successful war leaders but economically disastrous.) But the political analysis is salted with business-bashing and pro-big government quotes that read more like an Alter column than a straight news piece:

■ **Free market economic ideas are anti-people.** After listing lessons “43” should draw from “41,” Alter and Fineman declare: “The problem for today’s President Bush is that some of the lessons of his father’s failure are in conflict with each other. If he stays too faithful to free market conservative economic ideas (lesson No. 1), Bush risks seeming out of touch with the public’s pain (lesson No. 3).”

■ **All businessmen are politically compromised.** “Both the President and the Vice President are themselves former CEOs. A double-dip recession could make them political exhibits A and B of how late-20th century ‘crony capitalism’ enriched insiders at the expense of everyone else.” That spin will stick only if the liberal media make it their crusade.

■ **Clinton’s Treasury Secretary would have solved everything.** “Paul O’Neill is a gaffe-prone former corporate

executive best known for touring Africa with a rock star; lesser officials have no juice on Wall Street. Like his father, Bush lacks an oracular Robert Rubin figure with the clout to calm markets.”

■ **Thus, we should do what the “oracle” recommends.** “Might Washington revisit last year’s huge tax cut, which is scheduled to go overwhelmingly to the same rich crowd that is suddenly in bad odor? Rubin, Clinton’s former Treasury Secretary, says an ‘adjustment’ is essential. He tells *Newsweek* that the 10-year, \$1.5 trillion tax cut is a much bigger threat to the economy than the corporate scandals.”

■ **The first President Bush was right to raise taxes.** “It’s an article of faith among Republicans that George Bush sealed his fate when he went back on his 1988 ‘Read My Lips’ pledge as part of a 1990 budget deal that raised taxes slightly and cut spending to shrink the deficit. But what’s forgotten is that the deal worked. Even many Democrats now give 41 some credit for the boom of the 1990s; his deal helped restore confidence in the capital markets.” Imagine, “even Democrats” now think raising taxes was a good idea.

Alter has routinely disguised policy advocacy as political analysis. During the last campaign, he tentatively pushed Gore’s line that “Bush’s massive tax cut does overwhelmingly favor the wealthy at the expense of health and education. When that becomes widely known, it will hurt Bush.” That botched call appeared in one of his columns (August 28, 2000), but this week *Newsweek* promoted Alter’s spin as dispassionate analysis. That’s what transforms his plain old liberalism into odious liberal bias. — *Rich Noyes*

“Unfair” Was Good Enough Ten Years Ago

“Beyond a futile bid for capital gains tax cuts, Bush hasn’t seemed to care much about these domestic matters. In his heart, he thinks they are divisive and ultimately irrelevant to the purpose of his presidency. How else to explain why he expended none of the huge political capital he earned in the Gulf War on achieving concrete results at home?” — Jonathan Alter, “Dragging Bush Home for Broccoli,” in the November 11, 1991 *Newsweek*.

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“Historians agree that the caricature of an uncaring Bush I was unfair.” — Alter and Howard Fineman in *Newsweek*’s July 29 cover story.

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