

ON ASSIGNMENT

By Peter Robbins

The UFO Ridicule Factor in American Politics

It's something of a given in American politics: being perceived as someone who takes the subject of UFOs seriously is tantamount to political suicide, doubly so if you've been reckless enough to go on record as maintaining that some UFOs may represent advanced technology under the control of other intelligences from parts unknown. The biases against public figures who voice rational interest in this explosive topic are long standing, but particularly so for political figures and there are no real signs that we will see this change soon. Even so, understanding the dynamics which feed this warped view may ultimately assist us in transforming this cult of ridicule.

Since the summer of 1947 the American media, military and numerous other branches and offices of The United States government have done a superb job of implanting the false notion that a serious belief in the reality of UFOs is equivalent to delusional thinking and mental illness, or at the least simplemindedness. Some past Presidents and Presidential candidates have expressed genuine sympathy for UFO openness, only to recant later, then retreat into silence or the mob of naysayers. Let's take a look at some outstanding examples.

Michigan Republican Gerald Ford took a courageous stand for UFO openness during his days in the House of Representatives. A spate of unexplained sightings inundated his district during the mid-sixties and a number of the witnesses were people Ford had known for years. He took their accounts seriously and acted decisively in recommending that a committee be created to investigate the phenomena: "I think we owe it to the people to establish credibility regarding UFOs and to produce the greatest possible enlightenment on this subject." Such a committee was established in 1968 only to wither and die because of a lack of any serious implementation. Ford's UFO activism vaporized once he assumed the Presidency, as did any public comments on the matter.

Jimmy Carter is another. His UFO sighting occurred in January 1969 during his run for the Georgia governorship. Carter remembered it as "the darndest thing I've ever seen. It was big, it was very bright, it changed colors and it was about the size of the moon. We watched it for ten minutes, but none of us could figure out

what it was. One thing's for sure, I'll never make fun of people who say they've seen unidentified flying objects in the sky." His completed MUFON sighting report is one of Ufology's most interesting artifacts. During the 1976 Presidential campaign he went on record as saying that he would release then-classified UFO information if elected, with one possible exception: "I don't see any reason to keep information like that secret, but there may be some aspects of the UFO information which I am not familiar with that might be related to some secret experiments that we were doing



that involve national security or new weapons systems. I certainly wouldn't release that."

"Defense implications" were indeed cited as the reason he did not make good on his pledge.

We now know that President Carter wanted to transfer responsibility for UFO affairs to NASA, but its highly respected director threaten to resign if he did so. The Director's stated reason was that saddling the already financially overburdened space agency with responsibility for this routinely mocked subject would only result in popular as well as official ridicule that would jeopardize much needed funding. The President considered his options – then backed down, never to raise the issue again during his time in office. In later years Mr. Carter kept his distance from the subject, possibly because he'd grown tired of being asked about his sighting and earlier outspoken views. In 2007 he was quoted as saying, "I think it is impossible

in my opinion – some people disagree – to have space people from other planets or other stars to come here. I do not believe that is possible." Then again, that same year he allegedly confided to Shirley Maclane, "that basically the President or the Executive Branch is not on a 'need to know basis.'" Whatever opinions you may hold on Ms. Maclane or her views, the statement she relates is an extremely important one.

Ronald Reagan was something of an exception to the rule. He remains the only American President to have discussed the possibility of extraterrestrial invasion in public, though was always careful to do so in allegorical terms only. There is no contesting his having taken the subject seriously though. Reagan had had a stunner of a UFO sighting when he was Governor of California, multiply witnessed from the governor's plane. In a 1987 appearance before the 42nd General Assembly of the United Nations, he asked, "In our obsession with antagonisms of the moment, we often forget how much unites all members of humanity. Perhaps we need some outside, universal threat to make us recognize this common bond. I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world. And yet, I ask, is not an alien force already among us? What could be more alien to the universal aspirations of our peoples than war and the threat of war?"

Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico would like to know some of these secrets; in particular, those pertaining to what actually happened in his state in the summer of 1947. In 2004 he wrote, "It would help everyone if the U.S. government disclosed everything it knows. With full disclosure and our best scientific investigation, we should be able to find out what happened on that fateful day in July of 1947. The American people can handle the truth no matter how bizarre or mundane, and contrary to what you see in the movies."

But the Governor no longer takes the subject seriously, in public at least. The seeming reason for his change of heart goes back to the autumn of 2007 when Richardson was still a serious contender for the Democratic Presidential nomination. It was then that

Senator Dennis Kucinich was outed by the late political analyst and television commentator Tim Russert as having actually observed a UFO of some sort – this in the company of his wife and their friend – horror of horrors - Shirley MacLaine. For weeks to follow Kucinich was unable to make a media appearance without being questioned about the sighting. He soon tired of defending his perceptions and began responding to such questions with some humor, as in this interview with a Michigan radio station: "I later learned after this story surfaced that 40 million Americans have seen things in the sky that they thought they couldn't identify. I also learned that President Reagan and President Carter at one time or another saw UFOs. So it may just be that seeing a UFO is a prerequisite to becoming President."

But once the pundits and talking heads grew tired of working over Kucinich, they turned on Bill Richardson. Their reason? He was Governor of New Mexico, and we all know what is supposed to have happened there in the summer of 1947. The Governor acted quickly to control political fallout and within days disavowed any public pretense of taking the subject seriously, but not in a mean-spirited or undiplomatic manner: "...I promote Roswell as a tourism issue, but there is no credible evidence... I've never seen one. I doubt their existence, but I admit, I'm the governor of the state and I push the tourism promotion side..." Put yourself in the Governor's place for a moment and you'll begin to appreciate why such a response was, regrettably, both rational and appropriate.

These are a few examples of professional politicians whose careers intersected with a subject encumbered by such a virulent ridicule factor that even a passing association with it can leave the individual fighting for their political life. Perhaps America may someday have a President who, through one channel or another, learns enough, and becomes passionate enough about the subject in the process of learning about it, that he or she decides to put himself squarely on the line, then cross it, 'need to know' be damned. This is of course dependent on the possibility that such an independent, executive undertaking has even the possibility of succeeding.

But the ideal in a democracy would be for the House and/or Senate to spearhead such an initiative. The key to this possibility is education, but that necessitates a willingness to be educated. My guess is that taking time from their busy schedules to study the evidence



supporting UFO reality holds a low priority for the overwhelming majority of current office holders. But in the 1990s one of the wealthiest men in America undertook his own campaign to bring something of the truth to American elected officials.

Laurence Rockefeller's name was first publicly linked with the subject in 1995 with the publication of a series of newspaper articles. His interest quickly accelerated into activism, the end result of which was the Unidentified Flying Objects Briefing Document: the Best Available Evidence. This was accomplished with the aid of two old friends who shared his passionate interest; Sandra Wright and Marie Galbraith – wife of America's then-Ambassador to France and daughter-in-law of the economist John Kenneth Galbraith. They were assisted in their efforts by members of The Fund For UFO Research. The document's actual writers were the Fund's Don Berliner, Galbraith, and veteran ufologist Antonio Huneus.

In December 1995, copies of this handsomely bound 170 page report were delivered to every Congressman and House member, and as I understood it, the President, Vice President, cabinet level officials and other Washington movers and shakers. But its impact was considerably less than Laurence and his colleagues had hoped for. Whatever disappointment they may have felt was compounded by the outing which Rockefeller and Galbraith received on the front page of a newspaper called The New York Observer. On April 8, 1996, this weekly published an extremely mocking article entitled "Rockefeller Greets Aliens! A Rich Guy's UFO Dream." It was accompanied by a huge cartoon of Laurence and Marie running through Washington

shielding themselves from a sky filled with flying saucers and aliens. Even billionaires are subject to embarrassment and Mr. Rockefeller was no exception. Both he and Galbraith withdrew from any publicly expressed interest in the subject and returned to their private lives. The ridicule factor has spared few who sought the public airing of UFO related information. Rich men, presidential candidates, presidents, it doesn't matter.

The declassification of compelling UFO documents would go a long way in allowing elected officials to once and for all break through the ridicule barrier and take the subject seriously in public discourse. An effort similar to that undertaken by the Ministry of Defence (as well as the military's of a number of other nations) would play well in the States, even if the documents aired has minimal strategic value: at least it would be something. Yet the chances for declassification and dissemination are limited at best if politicians and influential public figures remain fearful of taking an open and courageous stand. How close are we to a golden era of UFO openness? Not very I'm afraid. Unlike some of my more optimistic colleagues I do not see such a time waiting just around the corner. This is no excuse to grow glum though. For the time being at least it has been left to us, those who study this subject and are not afraid to speak out on it, to educate others to the reality of the UFO phenomena, and no amount of ridicule will get in the way of our continuing to do so. Count on it.



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