

DECEMBER 18, 2003

**SCHAKOWSKY: BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S MISSTATEMENT OF THE DAY -
"HONESTY AND INTEGRITY" IN GOVERNMENT**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) issued today's "Bush Administration's Misstatement of the Day" following on honesty and integrity in government.

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While campaigning for the White House in 2000, then Governor George W. Bush often pledged that he would "restore honesty and integrity to the White House."□

However, the Washington Post today (*White House Web Scrubbing*, 12/18/03), reported that the "Bush administration has been using cyberspace to make some of its own cosmetic touch-ups to history," purging "offending comments" by Administration officials, and "has done some creative editing of government Web sites."□□

For example, the Washington Post reported that comments made earlier this year by Andrew S. Natsios, U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator, about the cost to reconstruct Iraq have "vanished" from the agency's Web site.□ Earlier this year, Natsios stated that U.S. taxpayers would not have to pay more than \$1.7 billion -- "which turned out to be a gross understatement of the tens of billions of dollars the government now expects to spend."

**White House Web Scrubbing□
Offending Comments on Iraq Disappear From Site□
By Dana Milbank
Washington Post Staff Writer
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It's not quite Soviet-style airbrushing, but the Bush administration has been using cyberspace to make some of its own cosmetic touch-ups to history. White House officials were steamed when Andrew S. Natsios, the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, said earlier this year that U.S. taxpayers would not have to pay more than \$1.7 billion to reconstruct Iraq -- which turned out to be a gross understatement of the tens of billions of dollars the government now expects to

spend.

Recently, however, the government has purged the offending comments by Natsios from the agency's Web site. The transcript, and links to it, have vanished.□

This is not the first time the administration has done some creative editing of government Web sites. After the insurrection in Iraq proved more stubborn than expected, the White House edited the original headline on its Web site of President Bush's May 1 speech, "President Bush Announces Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended," to insert the word "Major" before combat.□

Since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, administration Web sites have been scrubbed for anything vaguely sensitive, and passwords are now required to access even much unclassified information. Though it is not clear whether the White House is directing the changes, several agencies have been following a similar pattern. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and USAID have removed or revised fact sheets on condoms, excising information about their effectiveness in disease prevention, and promoting abstinence instead. The National Cancer Institute, meanwhile, scrapped claims on its Web site that there was no association between abortion and breast cancer. And the Justice Department recently redacted criticism of the department in a consultant's report that had been posted on its Web site.

Steven Aftergood, who directs the Project on Government Secrecy at the Federation of American Scientists, said the Natsios case is particularly pernicious. "This smells like an attempt to revise the record, not just to withhold information but to alter the historical record in a self-interested way, and that is sleazier than usual," he said. "If they simply said, 'We made an error; we underestimated,' people could understand it and deal with it."

For months after the April 23 Natsios interview on ABC's "Nightline," USAID.gov displayed the transcript. "You're not suggesting that the rebuilding of Iraq is going to be done for \$1.7 billion?" an incredulous Ted Koppel asked Natsios.

"Well, in terms of the American taxpayers contribution, I do," Natsios said. "This is it for the U.S. The rest of the rebuilding of Iraq will be done by other countries who have already made pledges, Britain, Germany, Norway, Japan, Canada and Iraqi oil revenues. . . . But the American part of this will be \$1.7 billion. We have no plans for any further-on funding for this."

A White House spokesman, asked later about these remarks, responded vaguely that he had not seen the statement in question. Then, sometime this fall, USAID made it easier for the administration to maintain its veil of ignorance on the subject by taking the transcript off its Web site.

For a while, the agency left telltale evidence by keeping the link to the transcript on its "What's New" page -- but yesterday the liberal Center for American Progress discovered that this link had disappeared, too, as well as the Google "cached" copies of the original page.□

USAID spokeswoman Lejaune Hall, asked about this curious situation, searched the Web site herself for the missing document. "That is strange," she said. After a brief investigation, she reported back: "They were taken down off the Web site. There was going to be a cost. That's why they're not there."

But other government Web sites, including the State and Defense departments, routinely post interview transcripts, even from "Nightline." And, it turns out, there is no cost. "We

would not charge for that," said ABC News spokesman Jeffrey Schneider. "We would have no trouble with a government agency linking to one of our interviews, and we are unaware of anybody from [ABC] making any request that anything be removed."