

'Endless barrage of lies' in American politics

By Anna Sanders

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 Bloomberg warns of 'endless barrage of lies' in politics

Michael Bloomberg
AP

Former Mayor Michael Bloomberg warned Saturday that the worst threat facing the country isn't terrorism or communism – it's "an epidemic of dishonesty."

The billionaire – who has called President Trump a "con" and a "dangerous demagogue" – cautioned that "an endless barrage of lies" and "alternate realities" in national politics endanger U.S. democracy. The comments came during a commencement speech at Rice University in Texas.

"This is bigger than any one person. It's bigger than any one party," Bloomberg told The Associated Press in an interview before the speech, refusing to comment on Trump's own relationship with the truth.

The 76-year-old businessman recalled the myth about the first U.S. president in which a young George Washington, caught cutting down a cherry tree, said he could not tell a lie.

"How did we go from a president who could not tell a lie to politicians who cannot tell the truth?" Bloomberg asked Rice grads, calling out both Democrats and Republicans without naming specific pols.

The wealthy exec, who flirted with a 2016 presidential run, told graduates and their families in Houston that when elected officials talk as if they're above the truth, they'll act like they're above the law.

"The greatest threat to American democracy isn't communism, jihadism or any other external force or foreign power," he said. "It's our own willingness to tolerate dishonesty in service of party, and in pursuit of power."

Epidemic of dishonesty in U.S. politics

 Associated Press STEVE PEOPLES ,
ed Press

 On this Oct. 21, 2017 file photo, Special envoy to the United Nations for Climate Change Michael Bloomberg addresses the media at the One Planet Summit, held at the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France. Americans are facing an epidemic of dishonesty in national politics, Bloomberg said during a commencement speech on Saturday, May 12, 2018, at Rice University in Houston. He said that "an endless barrage of lies" and "alternate realities" in national politics pose a dire threat to U.S. democracy. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena)

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Bloomberg to write
\$4.5M check for
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communism. That's according to former the New York City Mayor who warned in a commencement speech on Saturday, May 12, 2018 at Texas' Rice University that "an endless barrage of lies" and a trend toward "alternate realities" in national politics pose a dire threat to U.S. democracy. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena)

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NEW YORK (AP) — Americans are facing an "epidemic of dishonesty" in Washington that's more dangerous than terrorism or communism.

That's according to former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who warned in a commencement speech on Saturday at Texas' Rice University that "an endless barrage of lies" and a trend toward "alternate realities" in national politics pose a dire threat to U.S. democracy.

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old
billionaire, who flirted with an independent presidential run in 2016, did not call out any politicians by name.

Although he derided Donald Trump as "a con" and a "dangerous demagogue" before his election, in an interview before the speech Bloomberg refused to comment specifically on the

Official under
Obama, Bloomberg
expected to run for
mayor

Republican president's troubled history with the truth. Fact checkers have determined that Trump has made hundreds of false and misleading statements since entering the Oval Office.

"This is bigger than any one person. It's bigger than any one party," he said in the interview.

In the speech, Bloomberg evoked the legend of the nation's first president, George Washington, who as a boy said he could not tell a lie when asked if he cut down a cherry tree.

"How did we go from a president who could not tell a lie to politicians who cannot tell the truth?" Bloomberg asked Rice graduates and their families gathered in Houston.

He blamed "extreme partisanship" for an unprecedented tolerance of dishonesty in U.S. politics. People are committed more to their political tribes than the truth, he said, suggesting that the nation is more divided than any time since the Civil War.

"There is now more tolerance for dishonesty in politics than I have seen in my lifetime," Bloomberg said. "The only

thing more dangerous than dishonest politicians who have no respect for the law is a chorus of enablers who defend their every lie."

For example, he noted that Democrats spent much of the 1990s defending President Bill Clinton against charges of lying and personal immorality just as Republicans attacked the lack of ethics and honesty in the White House. Just the reverse is happening today, he said.

In one jab at Trump, he noted that the vast majority of scientists agree that climate change is real. Trump and his Republican allies have repeatedly called climate change a hoax promoted by America's adversaries.

"If 99 percent of scientists whose research has been peer-reviewed reach the same general conclusion about a theory, then we ought to accept it as the best available information — even if it's not a 100 percent certainty," Bloomberg said. He added: "That, graduates, is not a Chinese hoax."

He warned that such deep levels of dishonesty could enable what he called "criminality." Asked what specifically he was talking about, Bloomberg noted "lots

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Bloomberg's DNC speech blindsided Trump campaign

of investigations" going on, but he declined to be more specific.

Several Trump associates are facing criminal charges as part of a federal probe into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election. Three have already pleaded guilty to making false statements to the FBI. Federal investigators want to interview Trump himself, although the president's legal team has resisted so far.

"When elected officials speak as though they are above the truth, they will act as though they are above the law," Bloomberg told Rice graduates. "And when we tolerate dishonesty, we get criminality. Sometimes, it's in the form of corruption. Sometimes, it's abuse of power. And sometimes, it's both."

"The greatest threat to American democracy isn't communism, jihadism, or any other external force or foreign power," he continued. "It's our own willingness to tolerate dishonesty in service of party, and in pursuit of power."