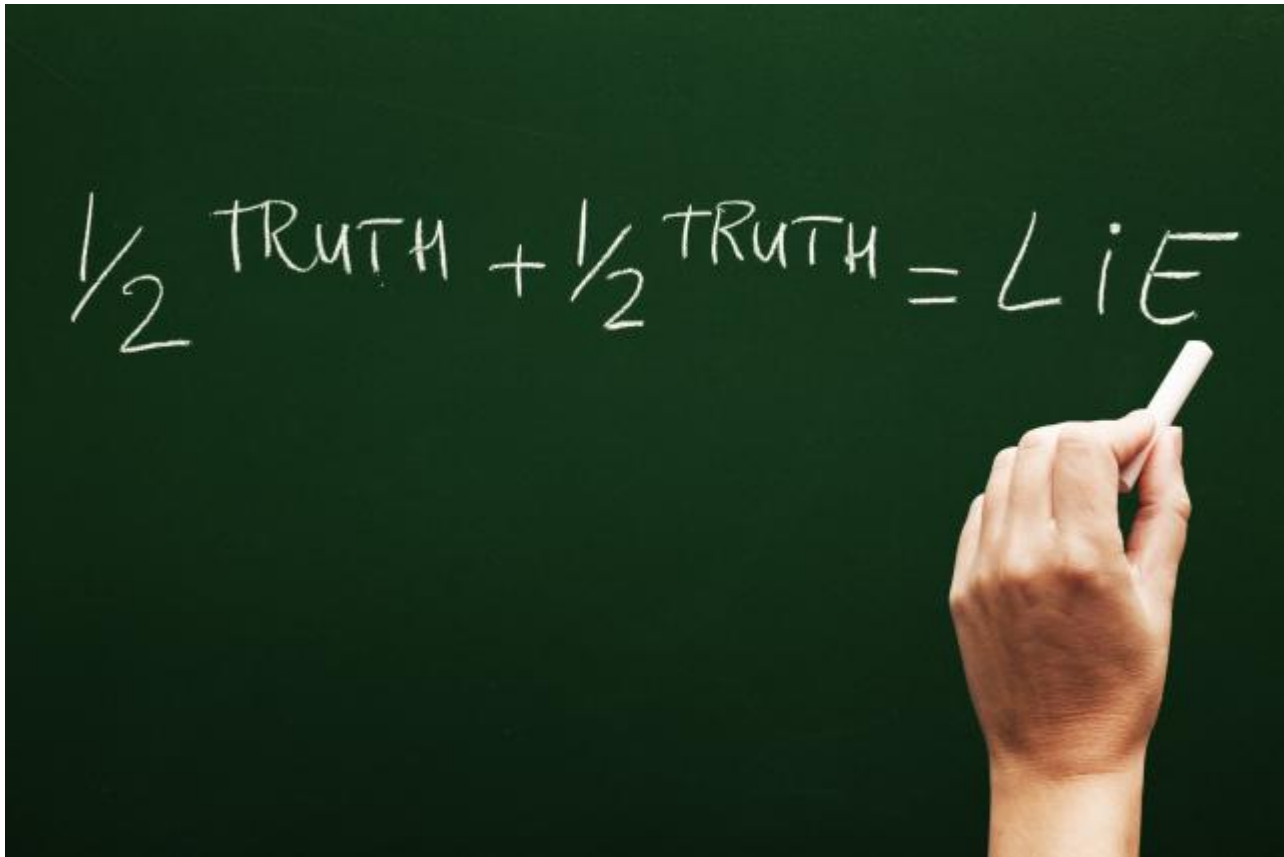


# Politicians' half-Truths and Doublespeak

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The doublespeak, evasive, defensive, muddled lines of thought exhibited here would be funny if this were not a serious issue. This smoke screen fools no one. Scott Maxwell recounts his experience with the politicians in the following [article](#) which appeared in the *Orlando Sentinel*.

*Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.*

*-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-*

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Double votes, secret chemicals, what the frack?

## [Scott Maxwell Contact Reporter](#) Taking Names

What the frack? Digging into double votes, secret chemicals and the spin game in Florida's fracking debate

Something unusual happened to me Tuesday night.

I had just posted my column about Florida's water woes ("[Florida's water woes are bad and getting worse. Do you care?](#)") when I received emails from two legislators alleging that I had gotten two things wrong in my column.

Now this was unusual because, while I get plenty of emails alleging that I'm a dipstick or asking whether my head is lodged somewhere stinky, I don't usually get accused of getting things wrong. That is for the simple reason that I don't very often.

I take a lot of time to get the facts right. I'm not saying I never make mistakes, but I go to great lengths to avoid them.

But on Tuesday night, State Reps. Jason Brodeur and Rene Plasencia took issue with my description of their votes for a controversial fracking bill earlier this year.

Brodeur didn't like that I had described the bill as one that would have allowed secrets to be kept from the public about the chemicals pumped into the ground.

And Plasencia didn't like that I had written that he had voted for the bill – when he said he had, in fact, voted no.

Neither of those things made sense to me. But it was so late at night – and I never want to have an error – that I went ahead and changed the language describing the fracking bill based on Brodeur's complaints for the next day's paper.

I should not have. Because it was right.

We'll get to that in a moment.

But first let's talk about Plasencia's request for a correction for my line that stated he voted for the bill.

That line was right as rain, which is why I didn't change it. You can look at the roll call for that vote yourself. It's right [here](#):

[https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2016/0191/Vote/HouseVote\\_h0191e1483.PDF](https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2016/0191/Vote/HouseVote_h0191e1483.PDF)

You will see a "Y" right next to Plasencia's name.

That means he voted "yes" for the fracking bill.

Plasencia's argument, however, was that five days AFTER the vote, he filed paperwork to change his "yea" note to a "nay."

Ahhhhhh. I had seen that before.

It sometimes happens when a politician in Tallahassee wants to please leadership (or the special interests that want a bill) by voting FOR a bill ... but also wants to be able to go back home and tell constituents he or she voted AGAINST it.

Here's the key fact: The after-the-fact vote doesn't count.

It wouldn't matter if every single legislator in the state of Florida changed their "yea" vote to "nay." The bill stays passed.

I knew this. But just to double-check, I asked the Republican House Speaker's office, who confirmed it as well, citing House Rule 9.4 that clearly says: "In no instance, other than by reason of an electronic or mechanical malfunction, shall the result of a voting machine roll call on any question be changed."

So first of all, there's that.

Still Plasencia wanted people to know he had changed his mind. He insisted that he was not trying to play both sides of the issue and that he and was guided by his own principles. In this case, he said, yes, he voted with his party during the only time it counted – but that later, an environmental engineer shared information him that and “Based off of what they said, I felt compelled to change my vote.”

But it didn't stop there. Plasencia also stressed that he generally believed the bill provided “a much needed regulatory framework” for fracking.

So, after hearing him tout the bill's overall value – while also saying he opposed it – I asked for specifics: *“Which specific part(s) of the bill did the environmental engineer convince you should not become law? Knowing the answer would help your constituents understand how this bill could get to a place where you would vote for it again.”*

That was yesterday. He has not yet responded. If he does, I'll share.

But, in summary, Plasencia *did* vote for the bill the only time it counted ... but later changed the record to reflect that he now opposed it.

As for Brodeur's complaint, he took issue with my description that the fracking bill “would have hidden from the public what chemicals were injected into the ground.”

Brodeur said that the bill he supported did the “exact opposite” of what I said, since it included language that required fracking companies to disclose the chemicals they were using.

And that is right ... except for one massive exemption. The bill

specifically allows companies to keep secrets about any blasting formula they use if they declare it a “trade secret.”

The entire point of that exemption is to give companies a way to keep those chemicals hidden.

Don’t take it from me. Take it from Brodeur’s GOP peers in the State Senate – the guys who finally killed the bill.

As the [Miami Herald reported](#):

*Sen. [Jack Latvala](#), R-Clearwater, asked ... department lawyers how they could agree to a provision in the bill that allows companies to use the state’s trade secret exemption from disclosing to the public the chemicals it is using in the fracking process. They did not provide a clear answer.*

*“I don’t think I’ve seen a better tap dance than what the DEP did today on the subject of trade secrets and the disclosure these chemicals,” Latvala said. “And, until I get comfortable on this issue, I’m a no on this bill.”*



Kim Ross

I also ran the bill and Brodeur’s claims by Kim Ross, the president of ReThink Energy Florida, who said Brodeur’s umbrage didn’t make sense.

“The information on trade secrets is right there in the analysis and bill,” she said, going on to say that the bill requires companies to report chemicals to the state, but that the company

gets to keep most any 'trade secrets' it wants unless citizens decide to "go to court to fight to have the information released. Meanwhile, people could be getting sick with doctors having no idea what the contamination is, while we wait months for a legal battle."

After sharing all this with Brodeur, he conceded that Latvala may have had some reasonable concerns – but stressed that, overall, he believed his bill was a good one that provides needed regulation for fracking industries.

Fine, champion all the fracking bills you want.

Just be honest about it – not just to me, but to the constituents you represent.

Because people are smart enough to understand when votes count and when they don't – and to form opinions about the secrecy of chemicals being pumped into their ground water.

It's just that, when the accurate information is out there, it's harder to spin.