

May 4, 2000

The Role of the President in the Politics of Disclosure Part I: The Decline of the Executive

Stephen Bassett

One of the most important political trends in the second half of the 20th Century is the weakening of the American presidency - important because of its role in the intricate, constitutionally structured checks and balance system mentioned in the first column in this series. (See [The Role of the People in the Politics of Disclosure](#).)



The principal targets of this counter force are the congress and the military. The judiciary is rarely in polarity with the executive largely because top judges are appointed by the president and each party knows they will get their turn. Abuse of influence would only result in retribution at a later time. It is worth noting here that the power and prestige of the Supreme Court has remained in tact during the decline of the executive office.

Congressional hyperventilation and malfeasance are restrained by the presidential veto forcing a two-thirds vote to override. This check is well known to the public. The check on the military rests in two principal areas. First, the president was installed as the Commander in Chief atop the chain of command. Second, the president can bring power to bear quickly utilizing executive orders, nationalizing the guards, etc. These checks are less understood by the general public and often questioned. Nevertheless they are essential to the thwarting of a military coup or draconian act by a rogue officer, an event virtually unheard of in the United States yet commonplace elsewhere throughout the world.

As the presidency has declined in power, prestige and public esteem, its relationship to congress has been modestly affected. It is the balance between it and the military, and by extension the intelligence agencies, that has been warped to the threshold of danger. It is at this point the politics of UFOs/disclosure comes into play. But first, why the decline?

The temptation has always been to lay the weakening of the American executive off on the flaws in the character of certain modern presidents. This misses the mark. The overwhelming influence has been the rise of a comprehensive, even ubiquitous, news media. Intense coverage of any national leader to ever deeper levels of the personal breeds contempt. (This principle has worked in spectacular fashion as regards the British monarchy.)

Very large books have been written about this media effect. Let's sum them all up – the President of United States lives with news media. The White House is the home office of the first family. A significant portion of the west wing of that home office has been converted into a press facility. Hundreds of correspondents, photographers and video technicians come and go every day. They operate, with benefit of tolerance and courtesy, in a beehive atmosphere in which dozens of tiny cubicles are crammed into little space, some of which once held the pool water. They are literally working in the deep end.

Want to get away? Out on the White House lawn are permanent camera platforms set up for correspondents to give commentary with the White House as background. Plans to move the media to new facilities outside the White House grounds with a secure, underground connection to the press offices have been floated. Not surprisingly, the press is reluctant to give up such extraordinary access.

To this author's knowledge no other leader in any country anywhere in the world lives with the press operating permanently within the residence/office itself. In order to truly appreciate this setup, you have to be there – it's quite amazing.

The great irony is that all of this access to the executive has reduced the power and influence of the office and made the access all that less valuable. As the scrutiny grows, substantive press conferences become scarce. We seem to learn more and more about less and less.

Presidents have become just another character in a soap opera, stand up comedians delivering expected shtick at roasts, press dinners and talk show appearances. We want them to have the power to launch civilization-ending war but tell us their underwear preference on demand.

There is now a fundamental rule in American life that operates with increasing consistency – when any aspect of our society is not working to our satisfaction, we demand television and movies in which it does work to our satisfaction. Crime on the rise and punishment/justice problematic? – TV and movie screens fill with police dramas with desirable outcomes. The presidency is losing influence and respect? – movies and programs about the office pour forth.

When one part of the larger system loses power, another gains. This power didn't go to the judiciary or legislature, it flowed to the military/intelligence complex. The mechanism of this transference – secrecy.



Open, accountable government became vaudeville in the case of the executive. While the presidents and vice presidents (and for that matter the candidates) were coming under ever increasing scrutiny, the military/intelligence complex slipped behind the secrecy curtain, dropped off the oversight radars, and merged into the background. It's programs and agendas were not going to be picked apart by the press, its member's private lives untouched, its actions unjudged, and its victims

unknown.



If the military/intelligence complex does not give up this power, the executive branch must take it back. This will be difficult without substantial media and citizen support, and there are important governing limitations.



First and foremost, we do not have whistle-blowing presidents. Huh? Presidents do not leave office and blow the whistle on people, agencies and programs. If they did, they would be a legal activist gold mine. Writing as a strong proponent of open government and secrecy reform, it is still not hard to endorse this practice. If a president acted in such a fashion, the consequences would be grave. Access to information for future presidents would be substantially impacted – the office would lose even more power and become little but a figurehead.

Consequently, if presidents are faced with a major internal reform issue, they have to address it while they are in office. The UFO/ET cover-up fully qualifies as a major internal issue, but a sitting president takes that one on at extreme risk to short term political capital, future electability and to the party.

But, an issue of such magnitude is exactly the kind of measure that would pull power back from the military/intelligence complex to the executive. It may be the only lever big enough to do the job.



Which brings forward the obvious question, which of the two remaining candidates for President of the United States with legitimate prospects of winning, will be more or less likely to take on the UFO/ET cover-up, the decline of presidential power, and secrecy reform – Bush or Gore.



Next week:

The Role of the President in the Politics of Disclosure
Part II: The Case for and against Bush

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May 17, 2000

The Role of the President in the Politics of Disclosure Part II: The case for and against George W. Bush

Stephen Bassett

(Second in a three-part series.)

Let's get one thing straight right up front. The politics of UFOs, how the presence of extraterrestrial beings in our world, now, is going to affect you, your government, and every other person on the planet, is not only bipartisan, it's transcendent.

Transcendence is about moving from one paradigm to another, one worldview to another. It is a process so powerful, the very mechanisms involved are altered. In fact, they are not really up to the task, but being all we have, we make do.

That which is about to happen to the world will affect every political party, nation, race, religion, and point of view. There will be no paradigm deferments. Everyone participates whether they want to or not. At this level, staking out territory, getting the upper hand, building political capital, war chests, arms races and other Machiavellian machinations are made silly. We will find common ground and work together as we find our way through this or we will make utter asses of ourselves before an audience that may extend to the other side of the galaxy.

And one response to this might well be, "so what."

The two main political parties don't happen to have a plank in their platforms on this particular matter. Worse, for some time they have immersed themselves in the "Politics of Nothing" where the truly difficult issues are ignored completely or locked into permanent stasis. What is left are the personal and the dregs. One is reminded of the old aphorism about college life, namely that, "the reason university politics are so vicious is precisely because the stakes are so small."

The process of electing an American president has now become sufficiently grotesque and expensive, voters no longer expect any deep controversy on a matter of true substance to force itself upon them during this quadrennial circus.

The media focuses 75% of its coverage on who's up, who's down, the polling numbers, endorsements, pratfalls, scandals and peccadilloes. Only 25% is left to cover what a candidate actually believes, assuming they would tell, or how they would govern, assuming they knew.

All of which might suggest, why not make the partisan case. Pick a party and convince it the UFO/ET intriguees out there number in the tens of millions (they do). Show 'em the websites, the mail lists, the demographics (high education, high income), the emotional intensity, and then close with, "Four words, 'Go Alien, Kick Butt.'" You got your pro-life vs. pro-choice, your pro-gun vs. anti-gun, and now, your Rare Earth vs. Aliens Coming out the Wazoo. Finally the politics of UFOs would take flight with everyone taking sides and spending hundreds of millions of dollars making TV commercials intent on showing the other side is comprised of idiots.

We could do that, but it would be wrong.

So let's examine the coming election and how a victory by George W. Bush might affect the process of disclosure of the extraterrestrial presence. But in doing so, let's not misinterpret a tough and candid analysis as a campaign ad for electing Al Gore (and vice versa, next week).

Election 2000 offers up a host of delicious ironies.

Much has been made of the millennial turnover. Certainly the politicians have taken advantage of this arithmetic inevitability. So many bridges to the 21st Century have been built, no one is at risk of getting their feet wet. A cynic would say the year 2000 is about as important as that moment, while stuck in another freeway jam up, you happen to note your odometer turnover 100,000 miles. You smile for a moment, and ten seconds later it's history.

Call it accident, fate, or a cosmic joke – the next couple of years will live up to the pre-turnover hype. This election campaign, conducted in the last year of the second millennium and placing a new president in office in the first year of the next, is indeed our political connection between two worlds. What is at stake is whether the 21st Century will surpass the horrors of the 20th or bring the human race freedom at last from the brutality, some say evil, of its pre-sentience animal nature, its lizard brain.

The moment screams for a president with profound new vision, someone poised by special background and circumstance, to lead the most powerful nation on the planet into truly new territory.

So, naturally, what we have is perhaps the most dramatic instance of "same old, same old" in memory. After eight painful years of dealing with the consequences of a president who lost, or perhaps never had, his moral compass, the Democrats put forth a candidate who is as close to a seamless extension of that president as has occurred in any election this century. More on that next week.



And the Republicans? In 1990 President George H. W. Bush began a campaign with an 80% approval rating. He was, and is, the quintessential 20th Century political man: WWII, cold warrior, diplomat, CIA, VP, secret societies, backroom connections, patriotism, control, plausible denial – the total package. Perhaps he somehow sensed that cosmic change was in the air because in mid-campaign the sitting president lost his vision, stomach for the process, perhaps even his desire to be president and came unglued

At the end he could barely deliver a speech without falling into near incomprehensibility. What followed was an upset, which in the opinion of this author surpassed that of Truman over Dewey in '48. William Clinton, the anti-Bush, is elected. He takes office as stunned

Republicans stare in disbelief.

Despised by the military and intelligence careerists to such a degree it becomes a serious matter of protocol noted by the press, Clinton immediately comes under political and personal attack almost unprecedented in the modern era. Finally, in a fashion worthy of Shakespeare's best tragedies, he defies his enemies with a consummate act of self-destruction and hubris, handing them all they need to destroy him completely and take the Democratic Party with him.

He barely escapes by virtue of the incompetence of the Republican leadership in the House and their own personal failures coupled with Clinton's almost preternatural survivability. Nevertheless, the country is put through a nightmare.

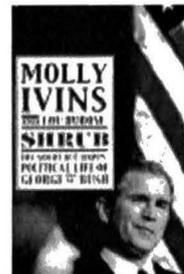
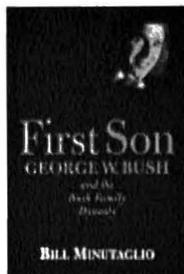
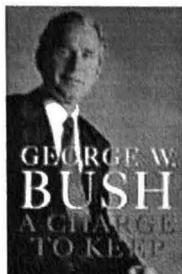
There is every indication the public wants to put this behind them - the extreme partisanship, special prosecutors, tawdriness, and political gridlock. They want a new start and a rejuvenation of the presidency which has been further weakened and humiliated. So who do the Republican insiders and deep pockets line up behind early on and in extraordinary financial fashion?

The son of George Bush, George Bush, a man in some respects more like Clinton than Gore.

There is a straightforward way to understand the worldview of the person you are about to elect to the presidency. Read three books. The first would be the candidate's political autobiography; the second would be a neutral, quality biography by a responsible journalist; and the third would be the most critical biography available by a competent journalist/author, however biased. Combined in the same mind, it's a potent amalgam.

For the average citizen who does not belong to a think tank or have much discretionary time to do political research,

this is as good as it gets. If the last five presidential elections have proved anything, it is that television ads, talk shows, cream puff interviews, convention show speeches, and scripted debates are meager fare if one seeks to know what a presidential candidate actually believes about anything.



As regards George Bush, the choices are not too difficult. The following are suggested in the same order: his political autobiography, A Charge to Keep, George W. Bush with Karen Hughes; a neutral biography, First Son: George W. Bush and the Bush Family Dynasty, Bill Minutaglio; and a highly critical commentary, Shrub: The Short but Happy Political Life of George W. Bush, Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose. (Note: Fortunate Son, J. H. Hatfield, is not recommended as there are serious issues with the author and authenticity of key elements of its content.)

Here's a summary of what you would learn.



George W. Bush and William Clinton were born 45 days apart in 1946. They had very different childhoods, but grew up to be tall, attractive, personable, men of boyish demeanor and playful personalities, with predominant ties to a southern lifestyle. Both attended Yale University and went on to become chief executive of southern states known to have “weak governor” systems, with Texas being the weaker of the two.

Bush and Clinton are practicing Protestants, Clinton Baptist, Bush Methodist and born again. Both men sowed a silos worth of wild oats, committing various “youthful” indiscretions which played a role in their campaigns. Those by Bush apparently did not extend into his marriage and ended around the age of 40, while Clinton's persisted with well documented results.

Both men avoided serving in Vietnam, Clinton via student deferments and Bush via alternative service in the Texas Air National Guard. Both utilized whatever connections they could to effectuate this result. Bush was accepted immediately into the Guard and pilot program with 100,000 Texans on the waiting list for the Guard and other pilot applicants (150) waiting up to 18 months to get flying clearance.

But enough about similarities. It's the differences that get interesting. William Clinton grew up poor and dysfunctional in a family less connected to power than dirt. It was this background which gave him the ability to relate to the average person and feel the pain of disadvantaged classes. It was his greatest strength and his greatest liability, as this same background laid the foundation for the ruination of his place in history and full appreciation of his contributions.

George W. Bush, on the other hand is possibly the luckiest businessman/politician in the galaxy. He is the Republican Jack Kennedy. John Kennedy came from a family ruled by a powerful man who viewed his sons' right to the presidency as a given. Joseph Kennedy used his money, the money of his friends, pulled every lever, stuffed ballot boxes, moved heaven and earth to give his sons a leg up with the presidency in the cross hairs.

A generation later, George Bush received the same treatment in spades. Through every step of his business and political career money poured in from political and financial connections to the family. Every time he got in over his head, he was covered.

This enormous reservoir of connected money was particularly potent in Texas politics where there is no limit on

personal contributions - \$1,000, \$1,000,000 – no difference. Bush spent over \$40 million in his two gubernatorial campaigns. That money combined with the money raised and being raised for the 2000 presidential bid, will make George W. Bush the most financially backed politician in the history of the nation. George W. Bush's father, the President, is a man heavy with gravitas whose résumé is thicker than the D.C. phone book. His son is Bush lite, not remotely in the same league. It is as if the Republican party is determined to rectify that terrible upset outcome of eight years ago, to put the world right.

What does it mean for disclosure?

In one regard it is favorable. From the standpoint of those managing the UFO/ET issue within the government, one of the most critical disclosure issues is control. They want absolute control of as many variables as possible.

If you are going to announce to the world the presence of extraterrestrial beings who can pretty much come and go as they please, whatever spin you intend to put on this revelation, you want to have the complete cooperation of the executive and legislative branches, military services, intelligence agencies, enforcement agencies, etc. You want to make disclosure on your terms, according to your schedule and be able to deal with any and all reactions to that disclosure as you see fit.

The status and power acquired by the military/intelligence complex during the Reagan years and the end of the Cold War symbolized by the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 set the stage. The senior Bush was the perfect president to have in office. It is this author's belief the process of disclosure was thus set in motion to occur early in Bush's second term (1993). The same circumstances set Col. Philip Corso in motion toward his eventual 1997 memoir, The Day After Roswell.

Clinton's election suspended the process. George W. Bush, if elected, would be a surrogate senior Bush. The military and intel agencies will embrace the son. The network would be reestablished, the players reassembled, the father's consultation a given, and control would be sufficient to proceed. So far so good.

But there is a downside. Ultimately the politics of UFOs is secondarily concerned with disclosure and primarily concerned with the *quality* of that disclosure. The end of the UFO/ET cover-up (or management if you wish) is inevitable. What is problematic is the veracity and comprehensiveness of the process. Will it be misrepresented and spun to serve government agendas not known to the public? Will it be destructive or constructive in its formulation? Will it build trust in government or further erode trust in the minds of the American public and citizens of other countries?

And the key question, will George W. Bush have the substance, courage and intellect to stand up to the military/intelligence infrastructure should they attempt to pervert the process and he knew it?

The election this November may be the most important in our history. Whether the voters know a flying saucer from a Boston cream pie, the presidential piece to the disclosure puzzle will be in their hands.

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May 29, 2000

The Role of the Presidency in the Politics of Disclosure Part III - The Case for and against Gore

Stephen Bassett

Washington, DC – In 1945 as WWII ended and the Cold War began - world human population was 2.3 billion. It had taken several million years to achieve that level. The Cold War symbolically ended in 1989 – world population was 5.2 billion. Today it is 6.1 billion.

This grand conflict was certainly unlike any before it. It was not the longest war in history, but it was the most expensive. Its cost estimation is a complex work in progress. However, factoring in all related expenditures by the United States and its allies plus the Soviet Union, and including the costs of environmental cleanup and disarmament, you get a figure somewhere between \$15 and \$20 trillion in 2000 dollars. This is an amount greater than the cost of all the wars waged in all of history.

Thus, in a period in which the population of the planet added 3.8 billion, the first world nations committed \$15+ trillion in treasure to an ideological difference of opinion. None of this money was available to feed, clothe, heal or educate the additional arrivals.

During the nuclear age, tens of thousands have died as a result of an atomic explosion. Tens of millions of have died as a result of the gap between human need and the resources required to serve it. By starvation, environmental degradation, disease, territorial wars over resources, genocide, and countless other derivative causes, the Cold War generated a profound level of suffering and death – it just didn't get the credit.

While we were focusing our fear and apprehension on the next nuclear bomb which never detonated, the population bomb exploded and laid waste to millions of the weakest and poorest of the human family. That this aspect of the Cold War took place outside the U. S. borders only dampened the awareness of the American public to its reality and ensured it would not be a factor in the policies created to pursue the conflict.

Like the general interest in UFOs, population concern tends to move in and out of fashion. Talk show legend Johnny Carson single handedly created a significant upswing in the 70's due to his personal interest and repeated guest appearances on the Tonight Show by Paul Erhlich, one of the leading environmental and population theorists. More importantly, there are few areas of controversy which are as verboten for politicians to engage as the UFO/ET issue – one of them is population control/reduction.

The U.S. Census Bureau predicts a world population of 9.1 billion by 2050 using very conservative growth projections. Beyond then, one would best not project, since the earth has hinted at methods by which further growth will not be permitted regardless of the degree of our need to breed. And these methods are of a type that only a Wes Craven could properly appreciate.

We grouse about the intrusive images of starving children that interrupt our channel surfing. If the trend toward 9.1 billion humans in 2050 proceeds, one should be prepared for all Sally Struthers, all the time. Unless there is a profound change in world view by the leaders and citizens of the advanced nations, the first half of the 21st Century will produce a level of suffering, death, and deprivation surpassing even the best our last century could generate.

Because the population problem and possible solutions are verboten as political discourse, those with legitimate concern usually proffer "environmental" front issues to indirectly address the question. As in the case of the extraterrestrial presence, there is always a price when the truths surrounding any controversy are kept out of the political arena.

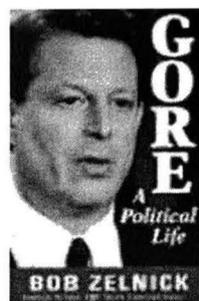
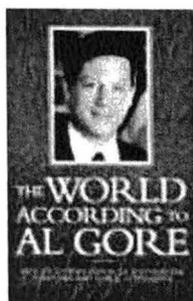
The 50-year death march to 9.1 billion human beings packed into a world of diminishing resources begins next year.



Which brings us to Vice President Albert Arnold Gore, Jr. It is already well known that Patrick Buchanan has the finest 19th Century mind in America. He will not become the president. The question before us is, "which candidate has a 21st Century mind?" Who either has or can acquire a worldview commensurate with the new set of problems the human race is about to encounter? And make no mistake, one of those problems will be adjusting to the knowledge we are being engaged by extraterrestrial beings more advanced and with a complex agenda.

Actually, there is an easy answer – Heather Harder. But she will not become the president either. This leaves Gore and Ralph Nader. As it happens, Green Party aside, Nader is very much a 20th Century guy. However, he is progressive and resonates with the disenchanted left. So much so, he might well play the same role as Perot in 1992, only this time on the Democrat side, and elect George W. Bush president. In politics, like nowhere else, what goes around, comes around.

To assess Gore as a potential president, the following books are suggested: The World According to Al Gore – Joseph Kaufman, Inventing Al Gore – Bill Turque, and Gore: A Political Life – Bob Zelnick, in ascending order of critical intensity.



But do not even think of voting for this man unless you have read, Earth in the Balance, his environmental/ theological/ political manifesto.



Written just after the near fatal accident of his young son, it is a highly unusual book for a political careerist, which Gore most certainly is. Outside of a few years as a journalist, he has been a professional politician following a path set out by his senator father. Gore does not want to write this book if he is following the rules of modern political strategy. Here he goes where others fear to tread. Does he have the worldview to take on an issue as difficult as the UFO/ET reality?

This book and Gore's intellectual interests would seem to make that case. But there are serious problems elsewhere.

It is difficult to read about Gore's career without thinking of *The Candidate*, a movie starring Robert Redford which gets hauled out of the vault every election year along with *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* with Alan Alda. The American public has come to believe the political process is fundamentally corrupting. No matter what degree of intellectual sincerity and vision you enter with, it will be stripped away by the time you leave. Al Gore may be the poster child for this cynical view.

The public is fairly fed up with ludicrously expensive, winning-is-everything politics. Gore has embraced both adjectives with a passion. As a result, his willingness to touch the UFO/ET problem on moral/ethical grounds, knowing it will damage him politically and hurt his party, is most certainly in doubt.

He is well aware of President Clinton's interest in the UFO subject, including the briefings of Clinton staffers and the charge given to Associate Attorney General Webster Hubbell by Clinton to look into the matter at the DOJ. He was

witness to these activities going over like lead trial balloons, and this includes the efforts of Rep. Steven Schiff of New Mexico. Further, Gore has never shown much interest in challenging the military/intelligence community.

If he has, in fact, lost his ability to say what he means and mean what he says regardless of the political consequences, there is not much prospect of his taking up the disclosure mantle as president.

However, Gore has shown courage at times. He volunteered for Vietnam against his own personal views because it would have hurt his father's senate campaign had he stayed out, which he most certainly could have done. He was one of ten Democrats who voted with the Republicans in support of President Bush's Gulf War resolution. It was a risky vote of conscience. It came at a time when he had withdrawn from the coming 1992 presidential campaign and was completing work on Earth in the Balance. It was the zenith of Al Gore's career as a man apart from the corrupting influence of paying for and winning elections.

Because of his service in Vietnam, the Gulf War vote, and unchallenged devotion to family values, he is viewed far more favorably than Clinton by the military and intelligence careerists who are conservative and republican in the majority. Should he win the election, they may consider dealing with Gore on disclosure rather than riding out another four years of government witness leakage and pressure by the UFO/ET activists and the media.

William Clinton had the opportunity to make the UFO/ET disclosure his presidential legacy. It would now appear he has chosen to make Al Gore his legacy. Perhaps he feels that disclosure under Gore will reflect back on him – a two-for-one.

Bush or Gore, take your pick. Regardless of who you choose, you will have to let him know in unambiguous terms you want the UFO cover-up to end, now. You might consider starting with the campaign. It is long past time for candidates for the highest office in the country to be repeatedly ask about the UFO/ET reality until they respond in depth without insulting anyone's intelligence. Long past.

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A campaign promise I expect Bush to keep!

Posted By: John <jlereaux@yahoo.com>
Date: Wednesday, 15 October 2003, at 12:26 p.m.

Oct 14, 1:58 PM

UFO expert comes to Brevard

By Billy Cox
FLORIDA TODAY

George W. Bush raised a few eyebrows during the 2000 presidential campaign when he responded to a question about releasing government files on unidentified flying objects. "It'll be the first thing he (Dick Cheney) will do," Bush said. "He'll get right on it."

Immediately upon assuming office, however, the Bush administration exhibited an impulse for even tighter controls on government information, long before the 9/11 security clampdown. From Bush's immediate suspension of the 1978 Presidential Records Act to Cheney's refusal to comply with a General Accounting Office request for the names of the Vice President's Energy Task Force members, patterns of concealment are consistent. Just last month, Bush signed Executive Order 12958, which gave the director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy the unprecedented authority to declare information "Top Secret."

"They didn't explain a rationale for it," says Steven Aftergood, director of the Federation of American Scientists' government secrecy project in Washington, D.C. "The only way to know for sure how significant it is, is to come back a year from now and see how many times it's been exercised."

UFO declassification proponents thought they were building momentum for congressional hearings with a forum of witnesses in May 2001 announcing their willingness to testify. Then, the roof fell in. "The Saudi Arabian flying circus came to town, and the U.S. declared an open-ended war against this term, this noun, called terror," recalls lobbyist Stephen Bassett. "All the attention and all the headlines got sucked up by 9/11, and all the political work went into suspended animation."

But UFO reports never stopped. Nor did calls for government accountability. Friday, one of the leading advocates -- Stanton Friedman -- will discuss what he calls the "Cosmic Watergate" at Brevard Community College's Titusville campus.

Author of "Crash at Corona" and "Top Secret/Majic," Friedman was among the first to revisit the 1947 Roswell Incident, in which military authorities initially announced the

recovery of a flying saucer, only to reverse themselves amid the ensuing media clamor. But from his home in New Brunswick, Canada, the American-born researcher blames contemporary media passivity for enabling a cover-up.

"The only way we'll make any progress with this issue is when the press gets off its duff and takes a serious look at all the documents that have been in the public domain for years," says Friedman. His background in nuclear physics landed him 14 years' worth of work on nuclear rockets, much of it classified. "I'd like to see them spend just 10 percent of the energy they invested in covering Gary Condit, Elian Gonzales and Monica Lewinsky."

Friedman contends government documents already in the public domain are loaded with smoking guns, not the least of which is the famous Bolender Memo. In 1969, just as the Air Force was terminating its public investigation of UFOs called Project Blue Book based on their negligible impact on national security, Brig. Gen. C.H. Bolender, deputy director of development for the USAF chief of staff, illuminated a backdoor policy: "Reports of unidentified flying objects which could affect national security. . . . are not part of the Blue Book system."

"The media needs a commitment to the truth and to ignore the crap," says Friedman. "There was a conference in Chicago in 1997, on the 50th anniversary of Roswell, and one guy shows up wearing alien antennae on his head. CBS was covering the event and -- wouldn't you know it? -- the guy with the headgear is the one who makes the news that night. This is typical."

Next April, during the presidential primary campaigns, Friedman and a host of investigators will join Bassett, founder of X-PPAC, the Extraterrestrial Phenomenon Political Action Committee, in Washington for yet another effort to forge UFOs into political dialogue. Bassett was on hand in 2001 when an initiative called the Disclosure Project pressed for immunity for whistleblowers whose testimony would violate their security oaths.

Among the most impressive insiders assembled by the Disclosure Project was a retired USAF captain who -- supported by Strategic Air Command documents -- was in a Wyoming ICBM silo in 1967 when a UFO drained the power from launch complexes housing 10 nuclear-tipped warheads. Another was a Federal Aviation Administration accidents division chief who, despite being told by a CIA agent to keep a lid on it, presented a box full of records concerning a harrowing, 30-minute encounter involving a UFO and a Japanese airliner off Alaska in 1986.

Although the Bush presidency apparently has no intention of addressing UFOs, its attitude is part of a bipartisan continuum by chief executives to avoid the issue. Jimmy Carter, for instance, filed a report of his own UFO sighting with the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena and promised an open investigation during his 1976 campaign. But as president, Carter never followed through. Bill Clinton,

according to the memoirs of former deputy Attorney General Webster Hubbell, directed him to get to the bottom of UFOs. Hubbell failed.

Repeated efforts by Florida Today to interview both Democrats about UFOs have been unsuccessful.

Last year, former Clinton chief of staff John Podesta announced his partnership with the Coalition for Freedom of Information -- funded by the Sci Fi Channel, a client of his PodestaMattoon law firm -- to try to end UFO gridlock. For CFI research advisor Ted Roe, the issue is compelling, but so delicate he refers to the mystery in broader terms: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena, or UAEs.

Roe is the executive director of the National Aviation Reporting Center on Anomalous Phenomena (NARCAP) in Vallejo, Calif. In order to improve flight safety, NARCAP, a private outfit, collects data on everything from ball lightning to plasma disturbances, as reported by pilots, radar operators and air traffic controllers. But getting these sources to cooperate is dicey, due to the exotic nature of many UAEs.

"The really strange ones involve cylinders, discs, spheres, red lights and white lights, V-shaped or boomerang-shaped objects. Some of them are huge," says Roe, whose colleague, Dr. Richard Haines, authored a controversial report in 2000 analyzing more than 100 incidents, entitled "Aviation Safety in America."

"Some of them seem to demonstrate an alteration of magnetic fields, which can cause compasses to turn up to 20 degrees off direction. They can have transient or permanent effects on avionics systems, such as shutting off transmitters."

In early September 2001, NARCAP sent survey questionnaires on UAEs to 300 pilots of a major airline carrier. "We couldn't have picked a worse week," says Roe. "Two days later, the (World Trade Center) towers fell." Still, NARCAP got a 24 percent response, with one of every six subjects reporting having seen something so bizarre they couldn't identify it. "But not a one of them reported it to management," Roe adds.

Roe says retirees are more likely to talk than active pilots, which isn't a surprise. "The airline facilitator who was trying to promote our survey wound up getting two psychiatric evaluations," he says. "There are 500,000 people in our target culture, the aviation community, who are very interested in this subject. But these experiences become toxic when they manifest into (pilots') environment."

Only constant media pressure, says Friedman, will force authorities to respond to public curiosity. After all, 72 percent of Americans responding to a Roper Poll conducted last year believes the government isn't telling everything it knows about UFOs.

"I read that with Watergate, the Washington Post had something like 16 people working that story at one time," says Friedman, who'll also be signing copies of his work at Barnes & Noble Booksellers on Merritt Island on 7 p.m. Thursday. "It's going to require that sort

of effort. You can have all the seminars and lectures in the world, but if the press doesn't come and follow it up, then you haven't had much of an impact."