

Karoline Leavitt's White House briefing doublethink is straight out of Orwell's '1984'

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White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt speaks during the daily press briefing on Nov. 4, 2025.

Andrew Harnik/Getty Images

During a press conference on Dec. 11, 2025, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt announced there was good news on the state of the economy.

“Inflation as measured by the overall CPI has slowed to an average 2.5% pace,” she said, referring to the consumer price index. “Real wages are increasing roughly \$1,200 dollars for the average worker.”

When CNN political correspondent Kaitlan Collins attempted to ask a follow-up question, Leavitt pivoted to an attack. Not on Collins, a frequent target of White House ire, but on Leavitt’s predecessor in the Biden White House, Democrat Jen Psaki.

Psaki, claimed Leavitt, stood at the same lectern a year before and told “utter lies.” In contrast, Leavitt insisted, “Everything I’m telling you is the truth backed by real, factual data, and you just don’t want to report on it ’cause you want to push untrue narratives about the president.”

The “real, factual data” that underpinned Leavitt’s statement was specious at best. The actual inflation rate for September was 3%, not the 2.5% figure cherry-picked from economic data. The rise in real wages? CNN business editor David Goldman writes that in the past year, U.S. workers have experienced “the lowest annual paycheck growth that Americans have had since May 2021.”

I’m a historian who has written about the enduring legacy of George Orwell’s ideas about truth and freedom. Listening to Leavitt assert a “truth” so obviously discordant with people’s lives, I was reminded of the repeated pronouncements from the Ministry of Plenty in Orwell’s “1984.”

“The fabulous statistics continued to pour out of the telescreen,” Orwell wrote. “As compared with last year there was more food, more clothes, more houses, more furniture, more cooking-pots, more fuel, more ships, more helicopters, more books, more babies — more of everything except disease, crime, and insanity. Year by year and minute by minute, everybody and everything was whizzing rapidly upwards.”

The novel’s doomed hero, Winston Smith, works in the Records Department that produces these fraudulent statistics – figures that are so far divorced from reality that they “had no connection with anything in the real world, not even the kind of connection that is contained in a direct lie.”

In the world of “1984,” not only are statistics invented, they are continually reinvented to serve the needs of Big Brother’s regime at any given moment: “All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary.”

Transparency as doublespeak

The lack of transparency depicted in “1984” has an uncanny echo in our current political moment, despite Leavitt’s repeated assertions that President Donald Trump is the “most transparent president in history.”

Leavitt has made that claim countless times, including in her public defense of Trump’s “Quiet, Piggy!” dismissal of Bloomberg News journalist Catherine Lucey last month.

In Leavitt’s usage, “transparency” has become a form of Orwellian “doublespeak,” a word or phrase which through the process of “doublethink” had come to encompass its exact opposite meaning.

“Doublethink,” in Orwell’s writing, was the mechanism of thought manipulation that allowed someone “to know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them.”

Doublethink was the mechanism that enabled the citizens of Oceania, the Anglo-American superstate governed by Big Brother’s authoritarian regime, to accept that “WAR IS PEACE; FREEDOM IS SLAVERY; IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.”

And it is the mechanism that allowed Leavitt to proclaim, in defending Trump’s unwillingness to release the Epstein files, “This administration has done more with respect to transparency when it comes to Jeffrey Epstein than any administration ever.” That claim was pronounced “fabulously audacious” by The Guardian’s Washington bureau chief, David Smith, in a story headlined “Nothing to see here: Trump press chief in full denial mode over Epstein.”

Making ‘lies sound truthful and murder respectable’

In his famous essay “Politics and the English Language,” Orwell wrote that “political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”

Over the past 10 months, Leavitt has, among other things, claimed that the now dismantled U.S. Agency for International Development – USAID – provided a grant of \$32,000 for a “transgender comic book” in Peru. Not true. She has misrepresented the “One Big Beautiful Bill” as fully eliminating taxes on tips, overtime and Social Security. In reality, deductions for these are capped. She claimed that Trump coined the motto “peace through strength.” He didn’t. The phrase has been in circulation for decades, used most prominently by Ronald Reagan during his presidency.

And she recently sought to delegitimize U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly and colleagues’ plea to servicemen and women not to obey illegal orders by suggesting tautologically that “all lawful orders are presumed to be legal by our servicemembers,” and hence Kelly’s plea could only serve to provoke “disorder and chaos.”

All governments lie. But Leavitt has become a master of the art of political language, wielded to aggrandize her boss, belittle his opponents and deflect attention from administration scandals.

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