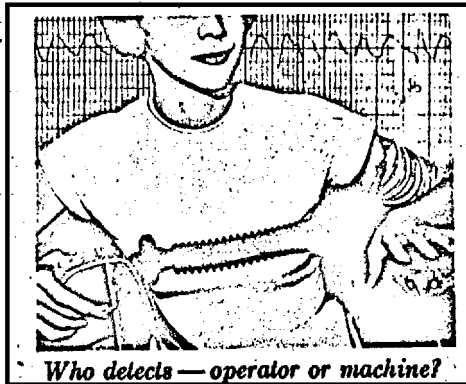


HEADLINERS: CORNELIUS E. GALLAGHER  
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Who detects — operator or machine?

# Do Lie Detectors Lie?

An interview with Congressman  
Cornelius E. Gallagher

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**Q.** Congressman Gallagher, why did you initiate a Congressional investigation of the lie detector?

**A.** "Because I am convinced that the so-called lie detector is a myth. And because I found shocking evidence of its use to degrade and humiliate Americans seeking jobs in the Federal government."

**Q.** For example?

**A.** "A mother came to me and told me that when her seventeen-year-old daughter applied to a federal agency, she was required to take a lie-detector

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test. The operator strapped her in the machine and began asking her a series of questions about her sex life. When she consistently denied any wrongdoing in this area, the operator sneeringly accused her of perversion."

**Q.** Is this typical?

**A.** "We heard many similar stories in the course of our investigation. We also learned that the government spends almost five million dollars a year administering some twenty thousand lie-detector tests — and this does not include tests given by the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency. Many of the people who give these tests have taken nothing more than a two- or three-week training course. These people have the power to destroy a man or woman's reputation and career. And because they are supposedly reporting only what this infallible machine said, there is no appeal."

**Q.** You don't think the lie detector is infallible?

**A.** "J. Edgar Hoover has said that it is not the machine, but the operator, that draws the conclusions. He told the Warren Commission that the FBI has never felt the lie detector is precise enough to permit absolute judgments of deception or truth without qualification. Some time ago James Bennett, head of Federal Prisons, did a survey of operators, asking them if they would take a lie-detector test if accused of a crime. He concluded from the answers that there were only three operators in the country they would trust. Dr. Stefan T. Possony of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, one of the nation's foremost intelligence experts, did a study of the lie detector and concluded that there were at least 28 ways a person could beat the machine. Another study, done for the Air Force, tried to determine whether it was possible to take the human element out of lie detection. The study concluded it was impossible."

**Q.** Where did the lie detector get such a great reputation?

**A.** "From people who have turned it into a very profitable business. The Federal Government is not the only employer in the country who uses the lie detector. One Dallas concern reported giving 42,000 tests to employees of private industry in 1964. These private agencies are really in business to clear the

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innocent — but there is no denying that it is the operator, not the machine, who is the real lie detector. And we found equally slight evidence in private business of operators being adequately trained. One witness estimated that eighty per cent of them are incompetent."

*Q. What sort of mistakes can an untrained operator make?*

*A.* "In one case, a woman employee of a shoe concern, taking a periodic test required by the company, had just lost her only son. She was emotionally distraught, and her reactions persuaded the operator to declare she flunked the test. She was summarily fired. In a second, more complicated case, a young bank executive flunked the question: have you ever stolen money from the bank or its employees? The bank could uncover no loss, and only after months of psychiatric probing did they realize that he had a strong hostility to his wife and mother, both of whom were customers of the bank. This explained the lie detector reaction. The psychiatrist who reported this case, incidentally, deplored the current use of the lie detector in business and industry."

*Q. What do you recommend?*

*A.* "I recently introduced a bill to virtually ban the use of the lie detector in the Federal government, and by any company in business done under government contract, until, when, and if, they can prove the machine is infallible. If it is to be used at all, it should be limited to the most serious national security and criminal cases, and then we should see that the operator is a person well trained in psychology and criminology. Finally, we should make sure that the person accused has a chance to challenge the findings of the lie detector, and that every effort is made to establish his guilt or innocence by other means."

*Q. What if they did make the machine infallible?*

*A.* "Even then, I would forbid its use on anything but a voluntary basis. Every person in this country has a constitutional right to privacy, and applying for a job does not give any employer the right to probe the private recesses of a person's mind. Nor does an employer have any right to give periodic tests to employees on the hypothetical chance that one in a thousand may be dishonest."

CORNELIUS GALLAGHER, Democratic Congressman from New Jersey, is serving his fourth term in the U.S. House of Representatives.

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