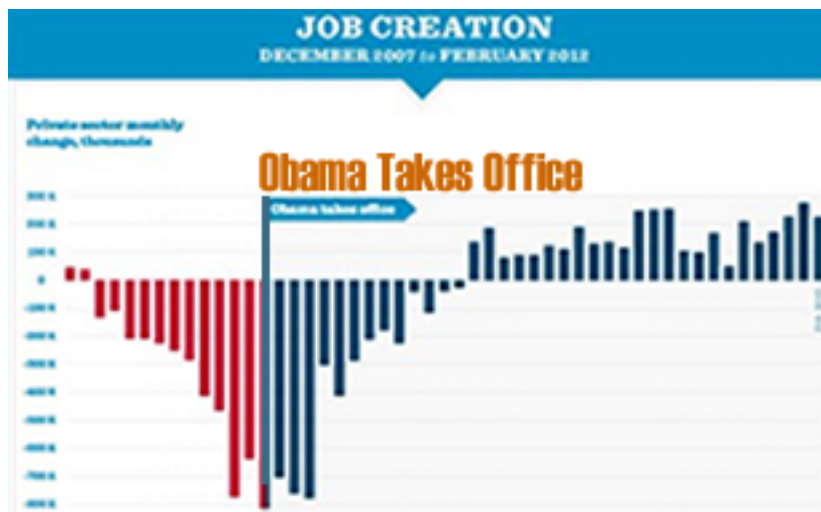


Conservatives Conspire to Do a Job on Latest Jobs Report

Written by George E. Curry, NNPA
Thursday, 11 October 2012 12:40



The birther issue – the preposterous idea that President Obama was not born in the United States – was finally put to rest, but that has not prevented conservative conspiracy buffs from seeing a plot behind the falling unemployment numbers.

Conservatives, led by Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, have been pounding Obama for maintaining an unemployment rate above 8 percent. They cited Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics to support their claim. Yet, when that same source placed the August number at 7.8 percent, they are trying to persuade the public that it is all part of a liberal conspiracy to re-elect Obama.

Led by the conservative Fox News network, the conspiracy about the conspiracy began long before the release of the latest numbers.

Fox's Sean Hannity said on May 12, "the vetting of Obama has begun, his economic record, his debt, his unemployment numbers which they are fudging, I don't think are honest..."

Two months earlier, Fox's Eric Bolling said: "Four million people have left the workforce. If you add that 4 million people – under President Obama – if you add those 4 million back in, the same amount of jobs, the same number of jobs divided right now among people in the workforce would show about a 12 percent unemployment rate."

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“So, are they playing around with the numbers? Look, it’s the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It’s supposed to be non-partisan, but that’s the Department of Labor, Hilda Solis heads the Department of Labor. Hilda Solis works directly for Obama.”

When Bolling was asked, “Are you saying they’re cooking the books?” he replied, “I’m saying, there’s room for error. There’s room. But when you’re talking about four million people, how do you know?”

If there’s room for error, Bolling is in that room.

As economist Justin Wolfers told Salon:

“First, if you know and understand the BLS and its structure – its statutory structure and its employment structure – you understand this simply isn’t how things happen. The BLS is independent of the Department of Labor. If you go to the BLS website, you won’t even find a picture of the Secretary of Labor there. It’s completely firewalled.

“The one exception to this would be the Commissioner of the BLS. The president appoints a BLS commissioner, but for most of this administration it’s been a Republican [my emphasis]. When his term ran out, Congress refused to confirm Obama’s appointee. So the current commissioner is, in fact, a career guy from within BLS, and if you know the institution at all, the BLS is an institution of nerds, by nerds.

“So you could even argue that Republicans have protected the BLS from political influence by refusing to confirm an Obama appointee?”

Joe Nocera, a New York Times business columnist, observed: “It is completely implausible to me that they would actively rig the thing to help Obama. The guys are green eye-shaded career bureaucrats who have no particular vested interest one way or another in who wins the presidential election.

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“[The numbers] come out of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, if you are going to cook them, how exactly would you go about it, it is pretty implausible that the career bureaucrats at the Bureau would cook the books for Obama. Everybody likes a conspiracy theory, but it is hard to understand how they would do it.”

There’s a reason fewer people are seeking jobs under Obama – and it’s not because of a conspiracy.

The Washington Post’s economic blog Wonkblog explained it this way:

“...Since 2000, the labor force rate has been steadily declining as the baby-boom generation has been retiring. Because of this, the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago expects the labor force participation rate to be lower in 2020 than it is today, regardless of how well the economy does.”

But conspiracy buffs don’t let facts get in the way of a good conspiracy theory.

Former General Electric CEO Jack Welch, a Republican, has joined the conspiracy camp. After the latest job report, he tweeted, “Unbelievable jobs numbers...these Chicago guys will do anything...can’t debate so change numbers.” Under attack for his unsubstantiated assertion, Welch tried to defend his comment by saying he should have used a question mark rather than a comma at the end of his sentence, as if that would have made a difference.

If there were a conspiracy, it failed. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that they had understated official U.S. employment over the previous two months. If they were plotting to help President Obama, they did a poor job.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine, is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service (NNPA) and editorial director of Heart & Soul magazine. He is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. Curry can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com. You can also follow him at www.twitter.com/currygeorge.
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