



Written by on July 9, 2011

Politics Versus Reality: Part II

No one is more of a master of political talking points than President Barack Obama. Remember "shovel-ready projects"? These were construction projects where the shovels were supposed to start digging the moment the government gave them the "stimulus" money. Two years later, Obama can joke about the fact that the shovels were not as ready as he thought. In reality, the shovels were never ready. It can take forever to get all the environmental approvals to build anything in today's political and legal climate.



If Obama didn't know that, his advisers surely did. He can treat it as a joke today but it is no joke for those who are saddled with the debts produced by his runaway spending in the name of "shovel-ready projects."

Nor is it a joke to the unemployed, who remain unemployed despite all the "stimulus" spending.

The talk about the many "green jobs" created by the government is likewise no joke. Since the government creates no wealth, it can only transfer the wealth required to hire people. Even if the government creates a million jobs, that is not a net increase in jobs, when the money that pays for those jobs is taken from the private sector, which loses that much ability to create private jobs.

Back in the 1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration hired more young men in the Civilian Conservation Corps than there were in the U.S. Army. But that never brought unemployment down into single digits at any point during that entire decade. As late as the spring of 1939, the unemployment rate was 20 percent.

Government-created jobs did not mean a net increase in jobs then — or now. But this is only mundane reality. What makes a great political talking point is government coming to the rescue of the unemployed by creating jobs. That talking point helps politicians get reelected, even if it does nothing for the economy in general or for the unemployment rate.

Among the biggest triumphs of talking points over reality are political discussions of rent control and gun control. Rent control supposedly rescues helpless tenants from the high rents charged by "greedy" landlords — at least in political rhetoric.

But the two cities which have the oldest and strongest rent control laws in the country also have the highest rents — New York and San Francisco. Yet that plain reality has not made a dent in the thinking, or lack of thinking, of those who support rent control.

Nor are they at all interested in other realities about rent control, whether in these two cities or in other cities around the world. These realities include housing shortages and a reduced supply of maintenance and other auxiliary services, such as heat and hot water.

Other forms of price control likewise lead to shortages, and have for literally thousands of years. But such plain realities do not affect the heady social vision conjured up by talking points.



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Far from being discouraged by such realities, those who believe in price control for housing often think price control for medicines and medical care is a great idea too.

We need not speculate as to what effects price controls can have on medicines and medical care because there are already shortages of both in countries where a government-controlled medical system includes price controls.

The talking points about gun control are as far removed from reality as the talking points about rent control. But on this issue, at least, the advocates cite some highly selective statistics to go along with their rhetoric.

Gun control advocates often point out countries like Britain that have stronger gun control laws than ours and lower murder rates. But they totally ignore countries that have stronger gun control laws than ours and higher murder rates than ours.

One such country is right on our border — Mexico. But there are others farther away, such as Brazil and Russia. There are also countries with higher rates of gun ownership than in the United States — Switzerland and Israel, for example — that have much lower murder rates than ours. But none of this has the slightest effect on the talking points of gun control zealots.

Related column: [Politics Versus Reality, Part I](#)

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