

The Delray Democrat

Are Republicans Deliberately Sabotaging the Economy? Are Blue Dogs Deliberately Sabotaging Biden's Agenda?¹

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These are rhetorical questions. Having crashed the economy, Republicans' only path back to power is to undermine Democrats' efforts to fix the mess they left behind. It works because Americans have short attention spans.

They are aided by Blue Dogs, a group of "centrist" and conservative Democrats who kneecap widely popular legislation supported by the people they purport to represent. Why? The corporate interests they actually represent wouldn't have it any other way.

Maybe not this time, however. It is heartening to see that President Biden has learned from President Obama's dealings with both groups.

When President Obama took office, the economy was in freefall. More than 3 million jobs were lost in 2008, and another 802,000 were lost in January 2009. Although this was largely the result of Republican malfeasance and incompetence, Republicans immediately closed ranks to hobble Obama's attempt to avert a second Great Depression.

Not a single House Republican and only three Republican senators voted in favor of The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). They argued that the bill was too costly, ludicrously claiming that the worst economic collapse since the Great Depression could be cured by simply lowering taxes.

The quarterly reports issued by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office put the lie to both: tax cuts were among the *least* effective job stimulators of all the various provisions in ARRA, with tax cuts to the rich coming in *dead last*. As to the *size* of the bill, the \$787 billion allocated to ARRA was actually far too *small*. It was sufficient to avert another Great Depression but insufficient to prevent the loss of more than 3 million jobs in his first year in office.

It's unlikely Obama could have gotten a bigger bill through Congress, but he made the rookie mistake of listening to and then publicly repeating Larry Summer's assurances that passage of a \$787 billion stimulus would keep unemployment below 8 percent. It hit 10 percent in October 2009, leading to a false but common perception that the stimulus had failed.

Had he listened to actual geniuses instead of media-anointed geniuses, he would have pushed for the \$2 trillion stimulus advocated by Economics Noble Laureates Joe Stiglitz and Paul Krugman.

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, [October 2021](#), p. 1.

Obama wouldn't have gotten it, but he would have been able to seize the narrative when the unemployment rate blew through 8% and spiked at 10%.

The CBO estimated that the \$787 billion stimulus prevented unemployment from increasing another 1%-2%. Had Obama gotten the funding Stiglitz and Krugman recommended, it's likely we would have avoided the Great Recession.

Knecapping the Affordable Care Act

By a 53-35 margin, Americans now have a favorable opinion of the Affordable Care Act, but furious and uninformed opposition to its enactment helped Republicans recapture the House in 2010. They were aided by the Blue Dogs, who prevented the passage of what would have been the most popular part of the ACA, namely, a "public option" allowing the government to offer insurance plans in competition with the insurance industry.

The debacle began when Montana Senator Max Baucus, the ACA's principal drafter, declared that "single-payer" was "off-the-table." (Baucus had received more money from the pharmaceutical and insurance industries in the prior 2 years than anyone in Congress other than John McCain.) Single-payer may have been a bridge too far (despite the fact that a substantial majority of Americans favored it), but Baucus doomed the public option by giving away his single-greatest bargaining chip.

Ironically, several years ago Baucus came out in [favor](#) of some form of single-payer, but he's long gone, replaced by a new crop of Blue Dogs only too willing to do the bidding of those who profiteer from human illness. Recently, Scott Peters, Kurt Schrader, and Kathleen Rice prevented a provision that would allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices from passing the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Prices for brand name drugs are more than 250% higher in America than anywhere else in the world, and overriding the Bush-era prohibition on Medicare negotiating drug prices with the pharmaceutical industry would lower those costs. It would be good for Americans facing crippling drug prices but bad for the pharmaceutical industry.

Thus it was not surprising to find that Big Pharma was the biggest contributor to Scott Peters's war chest and Kurt Schrader's second biggest contributor. Kathleen Rice doesn't appear to have significant contributions from Big Pharma but defended her vote by expressing concerns about "fiscal responsibility," apparently forgetting understanding that allowing Medicare to negotiate with drug companies would actually *reduce* the government's costs.

Schrader also joined a "gang of 9" to demand that Nancy Pelosi decouple the larger reconciliation bill from the bipartisan infrastructure bill, as *The New York Times* reported in a story falsely suggesting the "Left" was imperiling Biden's agenda. In reality, however, it was the gang of 9 "moderates" who were imperiling Biden's agenda by seeking to neuter the larger bill once the bipartisan bill passed, as Schrader [bragged](#) to the dark-money group "No Labels":

Let's pass that infrastructure package right now, and don't get your hopes up that we're going to spend trillions more of our kids' and grandkids' money that we don't really have at this point."

Unfortunately for the gang of 9, but fortunately for Biden's agenda, both Biden and Nancy Pelosi had learned from the past. They sided with the far larger group of progressives holding fast to the initial plan to consider the two bills together.

A Lower and More Vicious Form of Life

The Blue Dogs may be corporate whores but, as FDR might have said, they're our corporate whores, they still have that "D" after their name. Republicans are a different form of life – unrepentant, malignant, both literally and metaphorically "undead."

Not a single Republican voted for the American Rescue Plan *because* they knew it would help Biden. By contrast, the CARES Act passed the House by unanimous consent and the Senate by 96-0. That is, Democrats voted for the CARES Act last year, *despite* knowing it would help Trump.

As in 2011 and 2013, they are again threatening to cause a government default by refusing to raise the debt ceiling, even though the greatest share of debt was accumulated under Republican administrations.

But this time Republicans are not only fighting to prevent the American people from receiving the aid that they need, the aid that has been owed them for decades. They are actively sabotaging the American people and the American economy by encouraging lies about vaccines and opposing mask mandates. They know that the more COVID spreads, the worse it is for the economy and for Biden.

I'm sure that in the perverse and vile universe they inhabit, they feel justified. After all, COVID deep-sixed what seemed a certain second term for Trump, so they want COVID to derail the Biden recovery. Of course they ignore the fact that if Trump had been a competent, caring leader instead of the incompetent clown he was and is, he could have rallied the country behind and won that second term. And so what if hundreds of thousands of lives are lost as a result of their actions.