

“It’s the Media, Stupid”¹

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What you gonna do about it, what you gonna do?

Gonna fight it, gonna fight it?

[Ventilator Blues](#), Rolling Stones

“It’s the Economy, Stupid,” the meme coined in 1992 by James Carville, has had a solid run. It’s the reason Donald Trump lost in 2020, and today it is a drag on Democrats’ chances in the midterms.

But wait! Isn’t the economy going gangbusters, with over 6.5 million jobs created this year and the GDP estimated to hit 5.6% for the year? Isn’t child poverty projected to fall by half in 2021? Didn’t unemployment drop from 6.2% to 3.9% this year? *I know that, and you know that*, but vast numbers of the American people don’t know that.

Why? Because behind “it’s the economy, stupid” lies “it’s the media, stupid.”

For most of the public, opinions about the economy are based on personal experience and the information and disinformation they encounter in the media. For Republicans, the principal factor is the person who occupies the Oval Office. For example, in 2016, as Obama presided over the longest post–World War II expansion, 70% of Republicans [thought](#) the economy was doing poorly, but when the economy crashed at the height of the coronavirus recession, less than half of Republicans had a negative view of the economy.

Biden’s start was the fastest of any president since records have been kept, and it remains so. Initially, the media compared him to FDR, and his [approval](#) rating was steady through June 2021 (with a high of 57% and a low of 54%), remarkably high figures, given that fact-challenged Republicans disapproved by an 89-11 margin.

The media coverage changed dramatically in late summer. Here’s why.

There’s Money to be Made in Negative News

A recent [study](#) confirmed people pay more attention to negative than positive news, which is why there’s so much of it.

Fox and its spawn never need reasons to be unfair, unbalanced and unhinged, but the so-called liberal media needs cover in order to publish “mindless hit pieces” on Biden, as a [reader](#) characterized a recent *New York Times* article in an online post, adding, “Who needs foreign enemies when our free press drags us to a dictatorship?”

The complicated withdrawal from Afghanistan led to a slew of hysterical headlines above stories short on context. The slowdown in the economy caused by the Delta variant displaced all coverage

¹ [The Delray Democrat](#), January 2022, page 1.

of what remained a remarkable recovery, and the fourth quarter rebound in the economy (with jobs and GDP spiking and unemployment continuing to fall) was relegated to isolated articles.

The media have maintained an incessant, breathless, and increasingly louder drumbeat of “inflation, inflation” for the last 6 months, with shrieking headlines and snarky references to Jimmy Carter. Consideration of inflation’s causes, responsibility, and prognosis was confined to paragraphs deep in the story, where few Americans venture.

Inflation remains a problem, but wage growth outpaced inflation in September and October and is only slightly behind inflation for the year (5.1% versus 6.2%). Moreover, as a recent [article](#) in *The Wall Street Journal* explained in its opening sentence, our surging economy was a principal factor in that inflation: “*A booming U.S. economy is rippling around the world, leaving global supply chains struggling to keep up and pushing up prices.*”

It’s ironic that a Rupert Murdoch media outlet is accurately touting Biden’s accomplishments in its lede while the bastion of the so-called liberal media, *The New York Times*, publishes a silly article with the incendiary headline “Biden Throws In With Left, Leaving His Agenda in Doubt” about the stalled infrastructure bills.

Worse still, *The Times* also published a story titled “Biden ‘Over-Promised and Under-Delivered’ on Climate. Now, Trouble Looms in 2022,” the “mindless hit piece” referred to previously. I don’t watch broadcast news and I can’t bear to imagine what Wolf (“the emails, the emails”) Blitzer is blithering about these days.

And this is why the December Consumer Confidence Index [poll](#) found 63.1% of respondents satisfied with their personal finances but only 39.3% a positive view of the economy. People are doing okay but believe the economy is failing because that’s what they read and hear. “It’s the media, stupid.”

“Gonna Fight It?” Gotta Fight It!

There’s nothing we can do to reach the 70% of Republicans who believe the Big Lies or the 56% who follow QAnon. They are impervious to facts, but we can and must reach Independents.

We must fight the media’s false narratives and false equivalencies. Biden’s economic record would be historic even if he had not taken office during the worst crash since the Great Depression.

First, it’s important to recognize that the media **never** was “liberal.” As June Neal explains in a companion article on page 3, they “are businesses and exist to make a profit.” That means they respond to criticism.

For the last half century, Republican apparatchiks have been “working the refs” like the basketball players who repeatedly complain about “bad calls” in an effort to make the next one go their way. It’s been a spectacular success. To avoid being tarred with the scarlet “L,” and mindful of their bottom lines, the SCLM has steadily shifted to the Right.

We can move them back by demanding that they practice journalism. They are a business, but they are also the Fourth Estate, and we can insist that they begin behaving that way.

Every newspaper has a letters section, and most include links to post comments on-line. *The Times* even allows readers to contact most reporters directly via web mail. After *The Times* published the article claiming “Biden Throws In With Left,” I wrote to the two reporters and submitted a letter to the editor pointing out the various inaccuracies and distortions contained in the story. Neither reporter responded but *The Times* published the [letter](#). And the [comments](#) section of the “hit piece” on the climate noted above was loaded with trenchant complaints.

A craven, clueless, and hardly “liberal” corporate media unwittingly helped elect Donald Trump, and now they seem on the verge of recklessly aiding and abetting Republicans in destroying our democracy. They, and we, barely survived their defalcation of duty in 2016. We need to let them know that a recovery is unlikely to be possible the next time.