



The Structural Problem

BY ROBERT B. REICH
Tribune Media Services

The White House is breathing a bit easier. The president's awful debate performance was bad enough. If it had been followed by a bad jobs report, the president's chances for re-election might have plummeted.

But the report showed September's unemployment rate dropping to 7.8 percent — the first time it's been under 8 percent in 43 months.

Look more closely, though, and the employment picture is murkier.

According to the separate payroll survey, just 114,000 new jobs were added in September. At least 125,000 are needed per month just to keep up with population growth.

In other words, we're still barely crawling out of the deep crater we fell into in 2008 and 2009. The percentage of the working-age population now working or actively looking for work is higher than it was, but still near a 30-year low.

We're better off than we were at the trough of the recession, but evidence is accumulating that the U.S. economy has stalled. It grew at an annualized rate of only 1.3 percent between April and June, according to the most recent data from the Commerce Department. That's down from 2 percent in the first quarter of the year.

Consumer spending rose just one-tenth of a percent in August, after adjusting for inflation. Orders for durable goods (cars, TVs and other long-lasting manufactured products) dropped 13 percent, the biggest monthly drop in three years. And because incomes grew less than spending, the savings rate dropped to 3.7 percent — the lowest level since April.

Consumers say they're more confident about the future — and that's a key measure for how they're likely to vote. But the disturbing reality is that paychecks continue to shrink.

Put simply, America is still in the gravitational pull of the Great Recession. That's because consumer spending is 70 percent of economic activity, and the nation's vast middle class still doesn't have enough money to get the economy back on track. (The rich spend a much smaller proportion of their incomes, and their savings go around the world to wherever they can summon the highest return.)

What's more, the rest of the world isn't cooperating. Much of Europe is in recession because it's swallowed the "austerity" Kool-Aid. Japan is still a basket case, and China



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is slowing considerably. Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney says we're not doing well enough, and he's right. But the prescriptions he's offering — more tax cuts for the rich and for big companies — would be a disaster. And the cuts he proposes in public investments like education and infrastructure, and safety nets like Medicare and Medicaid, would take money out of the pockets of people who not only desperately need it but whose spending is critically necessary.

Romney's reverse Robin Hood economics would shrink the middle class even further and put a huge burden on the poor.

But the economic policies Obama says he'd like to pursue in his second term aren't large or bold enough to do the job.

The median wage has been stuck in neutral for decades. Since the 1980s, almost all the gains from economic growth have gone to the top.

The stagnation of middle-class wages was first masked by millions of women moving into paid work, thereby propping up household incomes. Then it was masked by massive household borrowing against rising home values.

The bubble that burst in 2008 has removed both masks. The economy can't fully recover until the middle class, and the poor who aspire to join it, have enough income to get it moving. For this to happen, they will need a larger share of the gains from economic growth.

Most people assume the recovery will continue, even at a slow pace, and that we'll be back to normal at some point.

But I'm not at all sure. "Normal" is what got us into this mess in the first place.

The concentration of income and wealth at the top has robbed the vast middle class of the purchasing power it needs to generate a full recovery — something that was masked by borrowing against rising home values but can no longer be denied.

Unless or until this structural problem is dealt with, we won't ever be back to normal. At the very least, if President Obama is re-elected and has a cooperative Congress, he'll have an opportunity to deal with it. If Romney is elected, he'll make the structural problem worse.

Robert B. Reich, Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California and former U.S. Secretary of Labor, is the author of "Beyond Outrage: What has gone wrong with our economy and our democracy, and how to fix it," a Knopf release now out in paperback.

Another 'Year Of The Woman'?

BY KATHLEEN PARKER
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WASHINGTON — How many years of the woman have we had? Let me count.

To the extent that women's votes count more than men's, it's been the year of the woman since at least 1964 — when women began outvoting men.

In 2008, 10 million more women than men voted, according to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

The operative assumption, obviously, is that women pick winners and losers as a voting bloc. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is true that more women are trending toward Barack Obama over Mitt Romney — but this is only partly owing to the usual, so-called "women's issues." And it is, potentially, temporary.

Thanks to certain outspoken members/supporters of the GOP, the Democratic Party has been able to capitalize on a fiction created by the Obama campaign — the alleged "war on women."

It is not helpful when people such as Rush Limbaugh call Sandra Fluke a "slut" for her position that insurance should cover contraception. Then there was Todd Akin's strange intelligence that victims of "legitimate rape" don't get pregnant, a flourish of rare ignorance. Check the birthrates in countries where rape is employed as a weapon. Finally, some Republican-led states have waved one too many ultrasound wands at women.

While these incidents and anecdotes provide handy faces for dart practice, they constitute a war on women only if all women find these positions reprehensible. And, only if all women care more about contraception and reproductive rights above all other issues, which is not the case.

This also happens to be the year of the fiscal cliff, when automatic spending cuts go into effect at the same time Bush-era tax breaks expire. It's the fourth year of a \$1 trillion budget deficit. It is also the year that the number of unemployed Americans is still too high and economic recovery too slow.

It is the year that al-Qaeda caught its breath and began gaining traction again, and when terrorists murdered one of our ambassadors. It is another year when America's standing as the world's brightest light continues to dim; and that the Arab Spring descended into an extremist winter.

These are things that women care about, too. Women, in other words, recognize the gravity of the



Kathleen PARKER

problems this nation faces and likely will pick a candidate based on these issues rather than on a party's platform on abortion and contraception.

In fact, women, who are not a monolithic group any more than men are, don't really rank reproductive issues at the top of their concerns. A recent Kaiser Family Foundation survey found that fewer than 1 percent of respondents mentioned women's health or birth control as top election-year issues. On access to birth control and abortion, attitudes tend to reflect party affiliation rather than gender. A USA Today-Gallup poll earlier this year found that women split on abortion in numbers comparable to the country as a whole, which is 49 percent to 45 percent favoring abortion rights.

Topping women's concerns are the same things that are men's highest concerns — the economy and jobs. The smartest candidate will recognize this sooner rather than later.

In Virginia's Senate race between former Govs. Tim Kaine and George Allen, Kaine, the Democrat, has tried to merge the issues. Abortion and birth control are fundamentally economic issues, he says. Few seem to recall that in one of the early Republican primary debates, Mitt Romney responded to a question about contraception as follows: "It's working just fine. Just leave it alone."

This doesn't sound like a call to arms against women. When subsequently asked what he thought about the gender gap, Romney said he wished his wife, Ann, were there to answer the question. Romney benefits greatly from his better half, as he would put it, but he errs in thinking a woman would do a better job answering the question than would a man.

Women do not require special handling because for the most part they do not think of themselves first or primarily as women. This is the big news for those men who failed to take note.

Women think of themselves as breadwinners and job-seekers. They think of themselves as parents who want good schools for their kids and enough money to send them to college. They think of themselves as Americans who worry about national security and the nation's image abroad.

These are the issues that matter to women, the vast majority of whom will cast their votes accordingly. How about we ditch the gender nonsense and declare this the year of the American?

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OPINION | OUR VIEW

Campaign Letters Have New Criteria

As has become the norm during the political season, we are starting to receive "letters to the editor" expressing support or dislike of one particular candidate or a particular issue. Many of these letters are well-written and are positive without any vulgarity or other offensive language, unlike much of what we see today on the national political stage.

Interestingly, some of these letters appear to be produced on the same computer, on the same typewriter (for those of us old enough to know what a typewriter is), on the same paper, mailed in identical envelopes with identical return addresses on the envelope — except for one key thing, the name of the sender. Our address on those sent via "snail mail" is always neatly typed with what appears to be the same typewriter or computer and spaced on the front of the envelope with identical positioning.

Sadly, we believe many of these letters are part of orchestrated efforts by the candidates being endorsed or those responsible for directing the campaigns. Many come from persons outside our circulation area, but inside the candidate's geographical area. Because of the similarities, we have chosen not to run these letters.

In every election cycle since my arrival in Yankton nine years ago, starting with the heated 2004 statewide election, similar patterns have emerged. Many of these letters were reluctantly run and our paper ended up devoting a remarkable amount of space supporting a couple of candidates. In fact, it became our opinion that it was unfair and an abuse of the "letter to editor" privilege we freely offer to our readers.

In a direct mail piece I received for an election campaign two years ago, I noticed something very disturbing. There was specific "letter to the editor" content printed in this mail piece encouraging those receiving it to write a "letter to the editor" in support of the candidate. It also boldly stated that the candidate's campaign manager believed that this technique of using letters to the editor signed by different people, but prepared by the campaign, was basically a means of garnering free advertising space. It stated that television and radio advertising had to be paid for (and please donate to support this effort) but the campaign could get space for free in newspapers with letters while spending the candidate's advertising dollars with other media.

Wow! I must say, we wonder how we could be so stupid. Our livelihood and our ability to provide our readers with a newspaper are dependent upon paid advertising.

While we encourage legitimate letters to the editor on almost any subject, we've made a crucial decision that we believe will and should have an impact on this year's political season. Letters to the editor endorsing or criticizing political candidates or issues will no longer run for free. The authors will be contacted if contact information is provided, and they will be offered the opportunity to use advertising space for their support or criticism of a candidate or an issue, just as they would have the opportunity to buy air time on radio here in Yankton and the surrounding region. These "letters" will be labeled "paid advertising." Of course, the writer may choose not to pay to have his or her advertising letter printed.

Sadly, the abuse by some of the candidates and their campaign managers with our "letters to the editor" section has probably stifled some exchange of opinion, but we know of no other way to stop the abuse.

Thanks in advance for your understanding and feel free to contact me with any questions that may arise.

Gary Wood, Publisher

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, Oct. 10, the 284th day of 2012. There are 82 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Oct. 10, 1962, President John F. Kennedy, responding to the Thalidomide birth defects crisis, signed an amendment to the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act requiring pharmaceutical companies to prove that their products were safe and effective prior to marketing.

On this date: In 1845, the U.S. Naval Academy was established in Annapolis, Md.

In 1911, Chinese revolutionaries launched an uprising which led to the collapse of the Qing (or Manchu) Dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China. California voters approved Proposition 4, giving women the right to vote, and Proposition 7, which established the initiative process for proposing and enacting new laws.

In 1913, the Panama Canal was effectively completed as President Woodrow Wilson sent a signal from the White House by telegraph, setting off explosives that destroyed a section of the Gamboa dike.

In 1935, the George Gershwin opera "Porgy and Bess," featuring an all-black cast, opened on Broadway; it ran for 124 performances.

In 1938, Nazi Germany completed its annexation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland.

In 1943, Chiang Kai-shek took the oath of office as president of China.

In 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower apologized to the finance minister of Ghana, Komla Agbeli Gbedemah, after the official was refused seating in a Howard Johnson's restaurant near Dover, Del.

In 1967, the Outer Space Treaty, prohibiting the placing of weapons of mass destruction on the moon or elsewhere in space, entered into force.

In 1970, Quebec Labor Minister Pierre Laporte was kidnapped by the Quebec Liberation Front, a militant separatist group. (Laporte's body was found a week later.) Fiji became independent after nearly a century of British rule.

In 1973, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, accused of accepting bribes, pleaded no contest to one count of federal income tax evasion, and resigned his office.

In 1982, Father Maximilian Kolbe, who died in the Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp, was canonized by Pope John Paul II.

In 1985, U.S. fighter jets forced an Egyptian plane carrying the hijackers of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro to land in Italy, where the gunmen were taken into custody.

Ten years ago: The House voted 296-133 to give President George W. Bush the broad authority he'd sought to use military force against Iraqi leader Saddam Hus-

sein, with or without U.N. support. Two executives who'd overseen WorldCom's financial record-keeping pleaded guilty to charges stemming from a federal probe of the company's multi-billion-dollar accounting scandal. (Betty Vinson was later sentenced to five months in prison; Troy Normand received three years of probation.) Hungarian novelist and Holocaust survivor Imre Kertesz won the Nobel Prize in literature.

Five years ago: A 14-year-old suspended student opened fire in a Cleveland high school, wounding two teachers and two classmates before killing himself. The United Auto Workers tentatively agreed on a contract with Chrysler. (UAW members ratified the accord, but with significant dissent.) A Russian spacecraft blasted off for the international space station, carrying Malaysia's first astronaut (Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor) and Peggy Whitson, an American who became the first woman to command the orbital outpost. German Gerhard Ertl won the 2007 Nobel Prize in chemistry on his 71st birthday.

One year ago: Christopher Sims and Thomas Sargent of the United States won the Nobel Prize in economics. NBA Commissioner David Stern canceled the first two weeks of the season after owners and players were unable to reach a new labor deal and end a lockout. Albert Pujols had one of the biggest postseason nights of his career in Game 2 of the NL championship series, going 4 for 5 with a home run, three doubles and five RBIs as the St. Louis Cardinals beat the Milwaukee Brewers 12-3 to even the series at 1-1. Nelson Cruz hit the first game-ending grand slam in postseason history, lifting the Texas Rangers over the Detroit Tigers 7-3 in 11 innings for a 2-0 lead in the AL championship series.

Today's Birthdays: Former Illinois Sen. Adlai Stevenson III is 82. Actor Peter Coyote is 71. Entertainer Ben Vereen is 66. Singer John Prine is 66. Actor Charles Dance is 66. Rock singer-musician Cyril Neville (The Neville Brothers) is 64. Actress Jessica Harper is 63. Author Nora Roberts (aka "J.D. Robb") is 62. Singer-musician Midge Ure is 59. Rock singer David Lee Roth is 58. Country singer Tanya Tucker is 54. Actress Julia Sweeney is 53. Actor Bradley Whitford is 53. Musician Martin Kemp is 51. Rock musician Jim Glennie (James) is 49. Actress Rebecca Pidgeon is 47. Rock musician Mike Malinin (Goo Goo Dolls) is 45. NFL quarterback Brett Favre is 43. Actor Mario Lopez is 39. Race driver Dale Earnhardt Jr. is 38. Actress Jodi Lyn O'Keefe is 34. Singer Mya is 33. Actor Dan Stevens (TV: "Downton Abbey") is 30. Singer Cherie is 28. Actress Aimee Teegarden is 23.

Thought for Today: "I have a strong moral sense — by my standards." — Rex Stout, American writer (1886-1975).

FROM THE BIBLE

Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Psalm 95:1. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

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