

December 6, 2011

Charles Krauthammer says it has come down to Mitt v. Newt.

It's Iowa minus 32 days, and barring yet another resurrection (or event of similar improbability), it's Mitt Romney vs. Newt Gingrich. In a match race, here's the scorecard:

Romney has managed to weather the debates unscathed. However, the brittleness he showed when confronted with the kind of informed follow-up questions that Bret Baier [tossed his way](#) Tuesday on Fox's "Special Report" — the kind of scrutiny one doesn't get in multiplayer debates — suggests that Romney may become increasingly vulnerable as the field narrows.

Moreover, Romney has profited from the temporary rise and spontaneous combustion of Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry and Herman Cain. No exertion required on Romney's part.

Enter Gingrich, the current vessel for anti-Romney forces — and likely the final one. Gingrich's obvious weakness is a history of flip-flops, zigzags and mind changes even more extensive than Romney's — on climate change, the health-care mandate, cap-and-trade, Libya, the Ryan Medicare plan, etc.

The list is long. But what distinguishes Gingrich from Romney — and mitigates these heresies in the eyes of conservatives — is that he authored a historic conservative triumph: the 1994 Republican takeover of the House after 40 years of Democratic control.

Which means that Gingrich's apostasies are seen as deviations from his conservative core — while Romney's flip-flops are seen as deviations from . . . nothing. Romney has no signature achievement, legislation or manifesto that identifies him as a core conservative. ...

Bill Kristol explains what we don't know about the GOP race, and why it is good we don't know.

... Confident pundits who treat the choice among them as an open-and-shut matter are behaving as . . . mere pundits. As are those who confidently proclaim which of the candidates is "most electable." For example, right now, Romney seems a stronger general election candidate than Gingrich. That's what most of the polling so far would suggest. But these polls don't capture the implications of the last couple of weeks of the campaign, which suggest that Gingrich can make the case for himself to heretofore unconvinced voters in a way Romney cannot. Admittedly, these are mostly Republican voters Newt has been charming. Can he similarly win over independents, or disaffected Democrats?

We don't know. We do suspect, however, that the mainstream media's view—and conservative elites' view—of who the swing voters are is somewhat distorted. Every journalist knows upper-middle-class, suburban, socially moderate independents on the East and West Coasts who (for now, at least) would be more likely to vote Republican if the nominee were Romney rather than Gingrich. Journalists do not tend to know the lower-middle-class, non-college-educated, churchgoing voters of exurban Tampa, or the working-class Reagan Democrats of Toledo, who are also swing voters, and who might prefer Gingrich. In any case, for now we don't really know which of the two frontrunners—or, for that matter, which of the other candidates—would have a better chance to win. And that's without factoring in possible third and fourth parties, which could

well appear on the scene in 2012 and would have different kinds of appeal depending on the identity of the GOP nominee.

We do not know. But if it's not given to us mere humans to know, we are capable of learning. We're a month away from the Iowa caucus. There are three months before 90 percent of the Republicans in the nation begin voting, and even then, further information will be produced and processed as the primaries unfold. The Democrats are stuck with their nominee—a failed and unpopular president. Republicans, by contrast, are free to choose. They are in no way required to rush to judgment. And they need not defer to pundits whose “station, office, and dignity” impel them to claim to know what they do not know.

We need to spend some time on last week's unemployment numbers. [David Harsanyi](#) is first.

... What would the unemployment rate look like if we had the same level of active workers as we did when the recession first struck? The American Enterprise Institute's James Pethokoukis [tweeted](#): “If labor force size was same as Oct., U-3 unemployment rate would be 8.9%; same as when Obama took office, 11%”. Eleven percent.

Apologies for my cynicism, but though the unemployment rate does not offer us the full story, politically speaking, it is an important political ingredient that could help President Obama — the man who helped turn a recession into a new state of normal — win a deeply undeserved second term for a couple of reasons:

1- Unemployment rates will decline and the economy will look a lot healthier than it actually is to many less-informed voters. Everyday Americans don't have the time to parse unemployment statistics — they just want to see the right trajectory. In the end, though, none of the underlying fundamental problems have changed.

2- The more Americans drop out of the work force the more Americans will be tied to some form of government dependency, the lifeblood of progressive politics. We are already experiencing record number of citizens [relying](#) on government, and while progressives might find dependency moral and beneficial, it is a sure sign of an ailing nation. ...

[James Pethokoukis](#) with seven reasons it is better, but still terrible.

1. The red flag here is the sharp drop in the size of the labor force versus October. The participation rate fell from an already low 64.2 percent to 64.0 percent. In a strong jobs recovery, that number should be rising as more people look for work. If the labor force participation rate were back at its January 2009 level, the U-3 rate would be 11.0 percent.

2. As it is, the broader U-6 rate — which includes part timers who wish they were full timers — is still a sky-high 15.6 percent, down from 16.2 percent last month.

3. The broadest measure of employment is the employment/population ratio and it rose to 58.5 percent from 58.4 percent. But as [MKM Partners](#) notes: “The employment/population ratio has

averaged 58.4 since December 2009, **meaning there has essentially been no real progress on employment in two years' time.** ... In other words, we are not growing fast enough to reduce the so-called output gap/labor market slack."

4. The workweek was flat, at 34.3 hours in November, but aggregate hours worked actually fell 0.1 percent after two months of relatively strong gains. (MKM)

Peter Wehner says the drop in labor force participation is disturbing.

On the surface, [the new jobs report](#), which shows the unemployment rate dropping to 8.6 percent from 9.0 percent the previous month, is good news. Below the surface, however, the news is actually quite disturbing.

According to the Department of Labor, 120,000 jobs were created last month, which is an unusually low figure for what is supposed to be a recovery. But what really stands out about the DOL report is that 315,000 people dropped out of the labor market in November. To put it another way: The number of people dropping out of the labor force in November was more than two-and-a-half times as large as those joining the labor force. In fact, the labor participation rate fell to 64 percent from 64.2 percent in October – nearly matching the lowest figure we've seen (63.9 percent in July) since the early 1980s. The long-term unemployed (27 weeks or more) increased as well, even as the average hourly earnings went down. (Wages are up by only 1.8 percent over the past 12 months while overall inflation increased by 3.6 percent.)

What this means is that we've got a very weak labor market.

Often a decreasing unemployment rate is a sign of economic strength. In this case it's a sign of economic weakness. And all the political spin in the world won't change that.

Pethokoukis looks deeper at political implications.

Despite [a sharp drop in the U-3 unemployment rate](#) last month to 8.6 percent from 9.0 percent, there was no triumphalism coming from the Obama White House this morning. As economic adviser Alan Krueger wrote on the [White House blog](#) about the November employment numbers:

Today's employment report provides further evidence that the economy is continuing to heal from the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, but the pace of improvement is still not fast enough given the large job losses from the recession that began in December 2007. ... The monthly employment and unemployment numbers are volatile and employment estimates are subject to substantial revision. Therefore, as the Administration always stresses, it is important not to read too much into any one monthly report.

Sobriety is certainly called for when the main reason the unemployment rate dropped so much was due to a shrinking labor force. And the broader U-6 rate, which includes part timers who wished they were full timers, is at a stomach-churning 15.6 percent. (Also recall that the unemployment rate during the last pre-Great Recession year averaged 4.6 percent.) But at least jobs are being created and the unemployment rate is falling.

So politically the November jobs report is a net plus for the Obama reelection effort. Or is it? ...

Margaret Wente says suppression of debate is a disaster for climate science.

Environment Minister Peter Kent has done us all a favour by stating the obvious: Canada has no intention of signing on to a new Kyoto deal. So long as, the world's biggest emitters want nothing to do with it, we'd be crazy if we did. Mr. Kent also refuses to be guilted out by climate reparations, a loony and unworkable scheme to extort hundreds of billions of dollars from rich countries and send it all to countries such as China. Such candour from Ottawa is a refreshing change from the usual hypocrisy, which began the moment Jean Chrétien committed Canada to the first Kyoto Protocol back in 1998.

Yet even though a global climate deal is now a fantasy, the rhetoric remains as overheated as ever. Without a deal, we're told, the seas will rise, the glaciers will melt, the hurricanes will blow, the forest fires will rage and the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse will do their awful work.

Or maybe not. As Roger Pielke Jr., one of the saner voices on the climate scene, points out, the hurricanes have failed to blow since Hurricane Wilma hit the Gulf Coast back in 2005. Despite the dire predictions of the experts, the U.S. has now experienced its longest period free of major hurricanes since 1906.

Washington Post

Mitt vs. Newt

by Charles Krauthammer

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The list is long. But what distinguishes Gingrich from Romney — and mitigates these heresies in the eyes of conservatives — is that he authored a historic conservative triumph: the 1994 Republican takeover of the House after 40 years of Democratic control.

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So what is he? A center-right, classic Northeastern Republican who, over time, has adopted a specific, quite bold, thoroughly [conservative platform](#). His entitlement reform, for example, is more courageous than that of any candidate, including Barack Obama. Nevertheless, the party base, ostentatiously pursuing serial suitors-of-the-month, considers him ideologically unreliable. Hence the current ardor for Gingrich.

Gingrich has his own vulnerabilities. The first is often overlooked because it is characterological rather than ideological: his own unreliability. Gingrich has a self-regard so immense that it rivals Obama's — but, unlike Obama's, is untamed by self-discipline.

Take that ad Gingrich did with Nancy Pelosi on global warming, advocating urgent government action. He [laughs it off today](#) with “that is probably the dumbest single thing I've done in recent years. It is inexplicable.”

This will not do. He was obviously thinking something. What was it? Thinking of himself as a grand world-historical figure, attuned to the latest intellectual trend (preferably one with a tinge of futurism and science, like global warming), demonstrating his own incomparable depth and farsightedness. Made even more profound and fundamental — his favorite adjectives — if done in collaboration with a Nancy Pelosi, Patrick Kennedy or even Al Sharpton, offering yet more evidence of transcendent, trans-partisan uniqueness.

Two ideologically problematic finalists: One is a man of center-right temperament who has of late adopted a conservative agenda. The other is a man more conservative by nature but possessed of an unbounded need for grand display that has already led him to unconservative places even he is at a loss to explain, and that as president would leave him in constant search of the out-of-box experience — the confoundingly brilliant Nixon-to-China flipperoo regarding his fancy of the day, be it health care, taxes, energy, foreign policy, whatever.

The second, more obvious, Gingrich vulnerability is electability. Given his considerable service to the movement, many conservatives seem quite prepared to overlook his baggage, ideological and otherwise. This is understandable. But the independents and disaffected Democrats upon whom the general election will hinge will not be so forgiving.

They will find it harder to overlook the fact that the man who denounces Freddie Mac to the point of suggesting that those in Congress who aided and abetted it [be imprisoned](#), took \$30,000 a month from that very same parasitic federal creation. Nor will independents be so willing to believe that [more than \\$1.5 million was paid](#) for Gingrich's advice as “a historian” rather than for services as an influence peddler.

Obama's approval rating among independents is a catastrophically low 30 percent. This is a constituency disappointed in Obama but also deeply offended by the corrupt culture of the Washington insider — a distaste in no way attenuated by fond memories of the 1994 Contract with America

My own view is that Republicans would have been better served by the candidacies of Mitch Daniels, Paul Ryan or Chris Christie. Unfortunately, none is running. You play the hand you're dealt. This is a weak Republican field with two significantly flawed front-runners contesting an immensely important election. If Obama wins, he will take the country to a place from which it will not be able to return (which is precisely his own objective for a second term).

Every conservative has thus to ask himself two questions: Who is more likely to prevent that second term? And who, if elected, is less likely to unpleasantly surprise?

Weekly Standard

We Do Not Know

by William Kristol

“The phrase ‘I do not know’ becomes inexpressibly bitter once one has proclaimed oneself to be a pundit, if not a polymath, especially when station, office, and dignity seem to demand that we should know.”

—Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism* (1783)

Mendelssohn was referring to the original pundits of the East—advisers to the king learned in religion, philosophy, and law. But our modern pundits seem equally averse to Socratic admissions of ignorance. They, like their ancient forebears, wish to claim full understanding of the present and clear divination of the future.

Let us avoid that fatal conceit. Let us boldly proclaim several things we do not know—even though our “station, office, and dignity seem to demand that we should know.”

We do not know who the Republican nominee for president will be.

It could be Mitt Romney—though our warnings in this space a couple of weeks ago that his victory is by no means inevitable seem increasingly justified by the dynamics of the race.

The nominee could be Newt Gingrich—whose rise in the polls has been spectacular, and whose skills and appeal are still widely underestimated by many elites, including conservative elites. On the other hand, Gingrich's own statement last Thursday that “I'm going to be the nominee” should be taken as a contrarian indicator that his campaign could hit some bumps. The statement was also a classic example of one of Gingrich's failings—that he even more than most politicians wishes to be “a pundit, if not a polymath,” for whom “the phrase ‘I do not know’ becomes inexpressibly bitter.”

The nominee could be Ron Paul—though it is likely that he will exceed expectations in early caucuses and primaries, but hit a ceiling of around a quarter of the vote.

It could be Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry, Jon Huntsman, or Rick Santorum—though it's probable that only one of them will survive Iowa, and that even that survivor will never quite make it into the top tier.

It could be someone not yet in the race. If the Gingrich surge turns into a Newt bubble, and if there continues to be the present level of resistance to Romney, then anyone from Mike Huckabee and Sarah Palin to Paul Ryan, Chris Christie, Mitch Daniels, Marco Rubio, or Jeb Bush—or someone else!—could jump into the race, or be dragged into the race, at various junctures over the next couple of months. Such a newcomer could quite conceivably win.

So we do not know who the nominee will be. Nor do we know who the nominee *should* be.

There would seem to be two basic criteria for answering this question: Can the nominee win the general election? And would he or she be a good president?

As to the latter, one could make a good case that all those mentioned above, except for Ron Paul, would be considerable improvements on President Obama. And one could make a variety of arguments for the virtues and limitations of each of the various candidates. Many of us at The Weekly Standard know many of the candidates quite well. Yet we differ among ourselves as to which, if in the Oval Office, would be most effective at governing the country, advancing the conservative agenda, and defeating our adversaries. Some of us have changed our minds on this question over the course of the campaign so far.

Confident pundits who treat the choice among them as an open-and-shut matter are behaving as . . . mere pundits. As are those who confidently proclaim which of the candidates is “most electable.” For example, right now, Romney seems a stronger general election candidate than Gingrich. That's what most of the polling so far would suggest. But these polls don't capture the implications of the last couple of weeks of the campaign, which suggest that Gingrich can make the case for himself to heretofore unconvinced voters in a way Romney cannot. Admittedly, these are mostly Republican voters Newt has been charming. Can he similarly win over independents, or disaffected Democrats?

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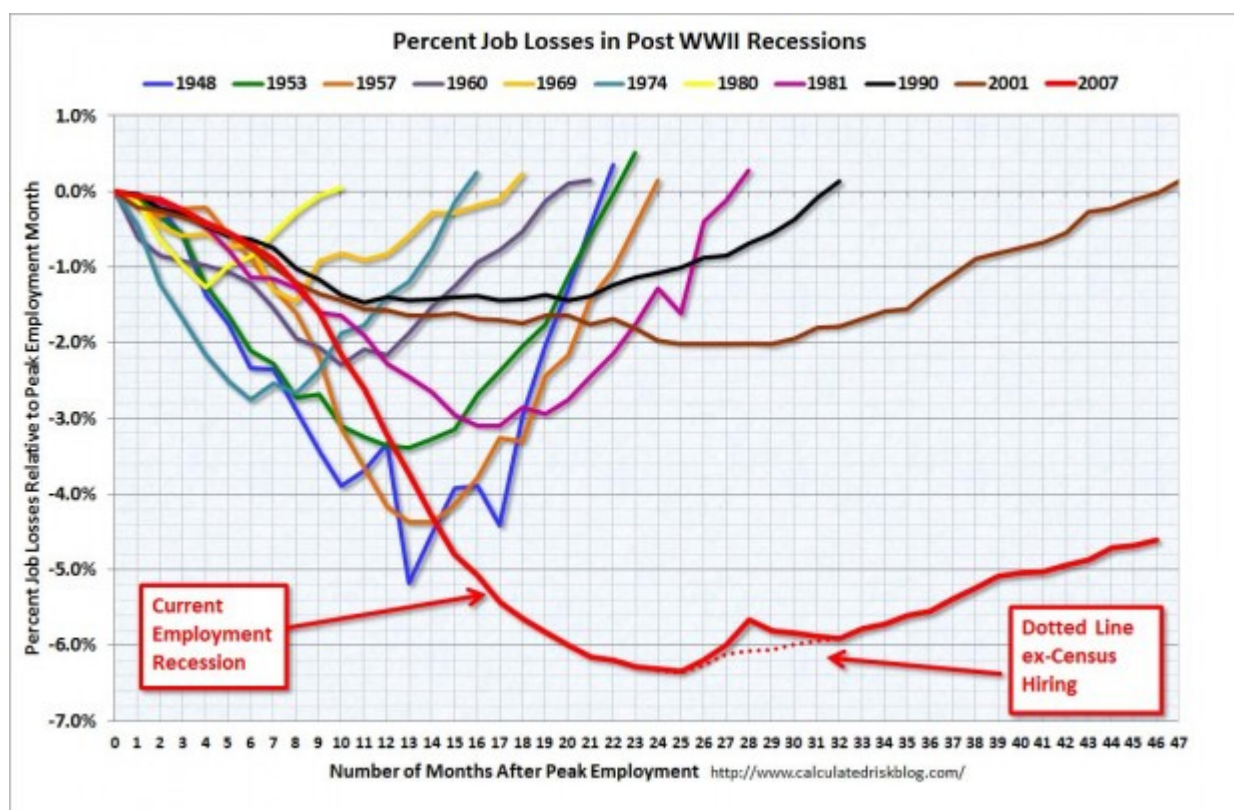
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Republicans in the nation begin voting, and even then, further information will be produced and processed as the primaries unfold. The Democrats are stuck with their nominee—a failed and unpopular president. Republicans, by contrast, are free to choose. They are in no way required to rush to judgment. And they need not defer to pundits whose “station, office, and dignity” impel them to claim to know what they do not know.

The Blaze

Unemployment numbers good for Obama — but not good for much else

by David Harsanyi



The chart [above](#) puts Obamanomics in its unpleasant historical context, in case anyone really needs to be reminded. But the terrifying thing is that the situation is far worse.

Take the news on unemployment. Yes, the United States added 120,000 [jobs](#) in November and the president will no doubt claim some victory – we’re getting out of a “ditch,” after all. The unemployment rate dropped to 8.6 percent from 9 percent and a broader unemployment rate from 16.2 percent to 15.6 percent. It is at its lowest level since August 2009. And revisions to previous months, we are told, [point in a good direction](#).

The New York Times [also assures me](#) there are “Signs of Hope in Jobs Report; Unemployment Drops to 8.6%.” So who am I to ask questions?

Hey, I'm not an economist. But the unemployment rate, though useful, seems to be an awfully overvalued metric. If the workforce is shrinking, then yes, the unemployment rate is likely to drop — it should drop — as well. Over the past month, labor force participation dropped from 64.2 to 64 percent. Americans are giving up the search for work as over 315,000 stopped looking searching in November alone. That's a lot of people.

What would the unemployment rate look like if we had the same level of active workers as we did when the recession first struck? The American Enterprise Institute's James Pethokoukis [tweeted](#): "If labor force size was same as Oct., U-3 unemployment rate would be 8.9%; same as when Obama took office, 11%". Eleven percent.

Apologies for my cynicism, but though the unemployment rate does not offer us the full story, politically speaking, it is an important political ingredient that could help President Obama — the man who helped turn a recession into a new state of normal — win a deeply undeserved second term for a couple of reasons:

1- Unemployment rates will decline and the economy will look a lot healthier than it actually is to many less-informed voters. Everyday Americans don't have the time to parse unemployment statistics — they just want to see the right trajectory. In the end, though, none of the underlying fundamental problems have changed.

2- The more Americans drop out of the work force the more Americans will be tied to some form of government dependency, the lifeblood of progressive politics. We are already experiencing record number of citizens [relying](#) on government, and while progressives might find dependency moral and beneficial, it is a sure sign of an ailing nation.

And with all this going on, Democrats fix their moral focus on the populist "wealthy aren't paying a fair share" canard because it latches onto populist anger and feeds the restive envy that some (still few) people feel during hard times. It's a play for votes not for economic growth. How does [asking](#) people to "sacrifice just a little bit more" help create jobs?

Rather than thinking of ways to free up the wealthy so they can generate more profit and more self-sustaining jobs, the president peddles a public sector union-bailout "jobs" bill we can't pay afford. A bill that would only continue to exacerbate the problems that state governments face. Rather than allow the economy to move forward — or anywhere, actually — we continue to bail out rotten institutions, regulatory expansion and now we're just sitting around waiting for another election.

All in all, pretty depressing for "good news."

[November jobs report: 7 reasons why it's better but still terrible](#)

by James Pethokoukis

When the U.S. economy grows as slowly as this one has for the past year, history suggests there's a 70 percent chance of recession happening in the upcoming year. But maybe we will be in the 30 percent group. The November jobs report out today is another data point showing the economy continues to grow, although not by very much. The U-3 unemployment rate fell to 8.6 percent (the lowest since March 2009), according to the Labor Department, as nonfarm payrolls rose 120,000 last month. Revisions to the employment numbers for September and October to show 72,000 more jobs created than first reported. [A bit more of a drill down from Reuters:](#)

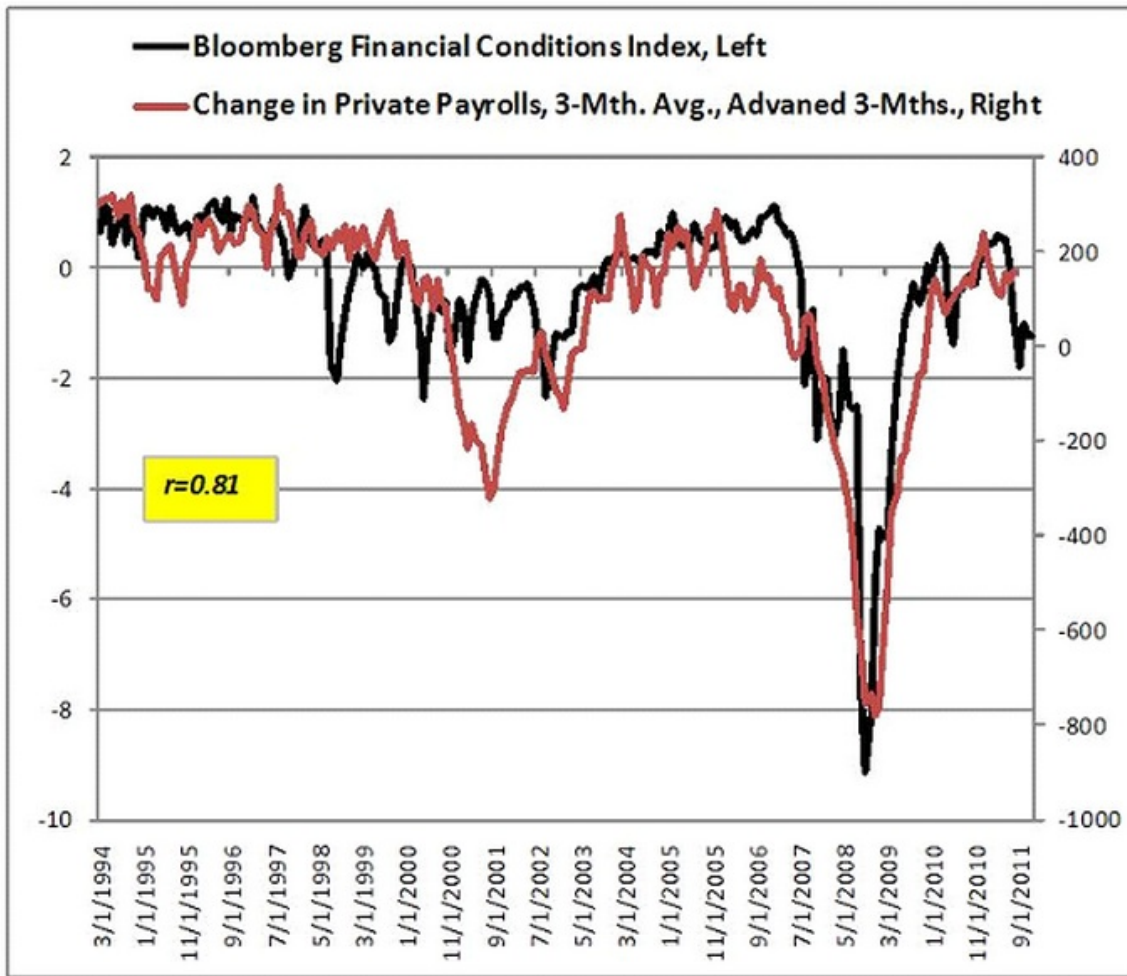
1. All the increase in nonfarm payrolls in November again came from the private sector, where employment rose 140,000 after increasing 117,000 in October.
 2. Government employment fell by 20,000. Public payrolls have dropped in 10 of the past 11 months as state and local governments have tightened their belts.
 3. Outside of government, job gains were almost across the board, with retail surging 49,800.
 4. Elsewhere, construction payrolls fell 12,000 after losing 15,000 jobs in October. Factory jobs edged up 2,000, with most of the gains coming from automakers.
 5. Health care and social assistance hiring rose 18,700 after adding 30,300 job in October. Temporary hiring — seen as a harbinger for future hiring — increased 22,300 after adding 15,800 jobs last month.
-
1. The red flag here is the sharp drop in the size of the labor force versus October. The participation rate fell from an already low 64.2 percent to 64.0 percent. In a strong jobs recovery, that number should be rising as more people look for work. If the labor force participation rate were back at its January 2009 level, the U-3 rate would be 11.0 percent.
 2. As it is, the broader U-6 rate — which includes part timers who wish they were full timers — is still a sky-high 15.6 percent, down from 16.2 percent last month.
 3. The broadest measure of employment is the employment/population ratio and it rose to 58.5 percent from 58.4 percent. But as [MKM Partners](#) notes: “The employment/population ratio has averaged 58.4 since December 2009, **meaning there has essentially been no real progress on employment in two years’ time.** ... In other words, we are not growing fast enough to reduce the so-called output gap/labor market slack.”
 4. The workweek was flat, at 34.3 hours in November, but aggregate hours worked actually fell 0.1 percent after two months of relatively strong gains. (MKM)
 5. Nominal wages also slipped in November for the first time since August. MKM: “The product of hours worked and wages paid is a proxy for nominal income, and it has decelerated to a 2.6% annualized rate over the last six months from just over a 4% rate this summer (prior to the sharp tightening in financial conditions). ... **While the economic data have been better of late, we remain concerned that we are seeing a bounce back from a series of supply shocks**

earlier in the year that may not be sustained against the foliage of tighter financial conditions, a deep recession in Europe and a sharp slowdown in China and emerging-market countries.”

6. We may not have seen the last of the unemployment 9-handle given a likely growth slowdown next year. As IHS Global Insight notes:

Third-quarter GDP growth was revised down to 2.0% only because inventories fell. Very lean inventories will support future production growth, in order to keep pace with sales. We have upgraded our fourth-quarter growth forecast to 2.6%, from 2.0%. **But we still expect growth to slip back into the 1.5–2.0% range in 2012. Domestic fiscal policy remains contractionary, slower global growth will weigh on exports, and the Eurozone financial crisis will mean at least some tightening of credit conditions in the United States.** But the better recent domestic news means we have upgraded 2012 growth to 1.8%, from 1.6% (2011 growth now rounds down to 1.7%, instead of rounding up to 1.8%).

7. This chart from MKM illustrates how tightening financial condition may well drag on the labor market going forward:



Contentions

[Disturbing News Underneath Jobs Headline](#)

by Peter Wehner

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American.com

[What the big drop in the unemployment rate means for Obama's reelection](#)

by James Pethokoukis

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Sobriety is certainly called for when the main reason the unemployment rate dropped so much was due to a shrinking labor force. And the broader U-6 rate, which includes part timers who wished they were full timers, is at a stomach-churning 15.6 percent. (Also recall that the unemployment rate during the last pre-Great Recession year averaged 4.6 percent.) But at least jobs are being created and the unemployment rate is falling.

So politically the November jobs report is a net plus for the Obama reelection effort. Or is it? Although pundits like to focus on the unemployment rate, it may not be the determining economic factor for 2012. [Yale political scientist Ray Fair](#) has a highly regarded election forecasting model that takes into account factors such as the power of incumbency, real per capita GDP growth, and inflation. But the unemployment rate is not one of them. If you assume the economy in 2012 looks a lot like the economy in 2011—as many Wall Street economists currently do—here is how the presidential election would play out:

Compute Vote Predictions: Output Values

The equation to predict the 2012 presidential election is

$$VP = 48.39 + .672 * G - .654 * P + 0.990 * Z$$

The equation to predict the 2012 House election is

$$VC = 45.63 + .384 * G - .373 * P + 0.565 * Z$$

Your input values:

- 1.00 growth rate of real per capita GDP in the first 3 quarters of 2012 (annual rate) (G)
- 1.88 growth rate of the GDP deflator in the first 15 quarters of the Obama administration, 2009:1-2012:3 (annual rate) (P)
- 0 number of quarters in the first 15 quarters of the Obama administration in which the growth rate of real per capita GDP is greater than 3.2 percent at an annual rate (Z)

Computed (output) values:

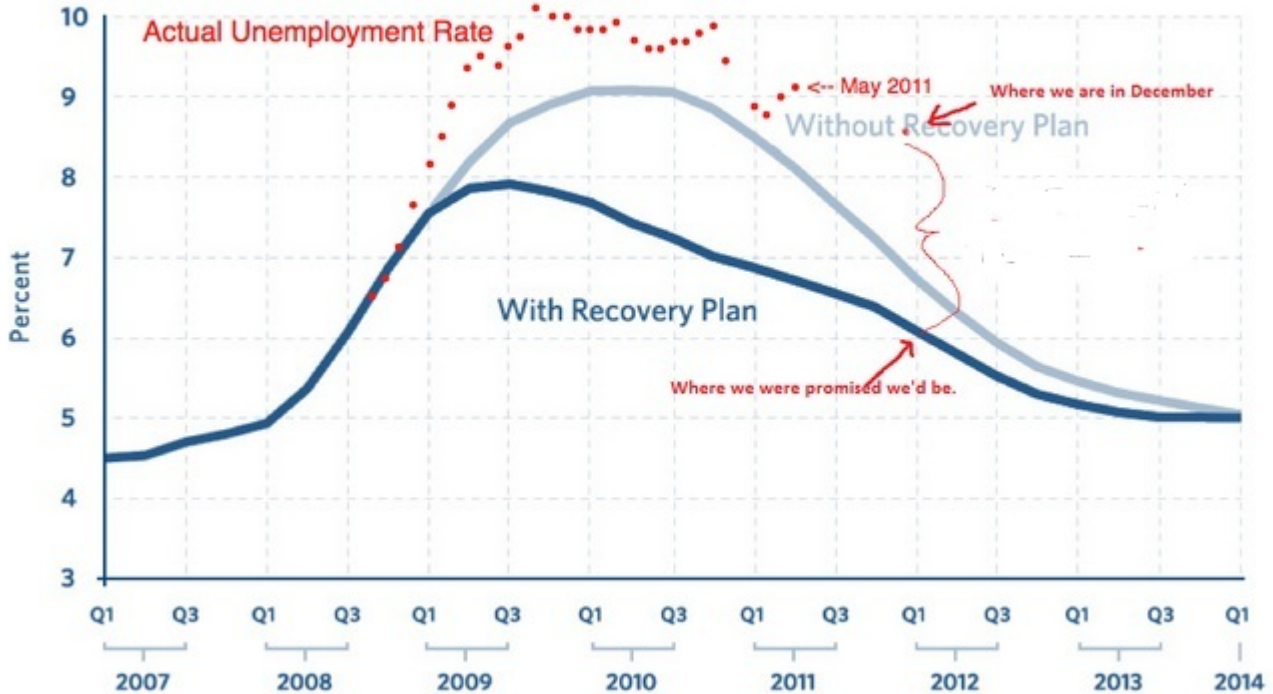
- 47.83 Democratic share of the two-party presidential vote in 2012 (VP)
- 45.31 Democratic share of the two-party House vote in 2012 (VC)

Bottom line: As you can see, President Obama would get less than 48 percent of the two-party vote and would be unlikely to command an electoral college majority. (Interesting sidenote: Incumbent presidents very rarely win with worse popular vote percentages than for their first term.) Now, other political scientist like to look at income numbers. And those can't please the White House, either (via MKM Partners):

The product of hours worked and wages paid is a proxy for nominal income, and it has decelerated to a 2.6 percent annualized rate over the last six months from just over a 4 percent rate this summer (prior to the sharp tightening in financial conditions).

Obama still needs a rapid acceleration in growth to be considered anything better than even-money in 2012. And you can be sure to see more of this modified Romer-Bernstein chart from the GOP ([via the always helpful and must-read Right Sphere](#)):

Figure 1
 Unemployment Rate With and Without the Recovery Plan



Toronto Globe and Mail

Suppression of climate debate is a disaster for science

by Margaret Wentz

Environment Minister Peter Kent has done us all a favour by stating the obvious: Canada has no intention of signing on to a new Kyoto deal. So long as, the world's biggest emitters want nothing to do with it, we'd be crazy if we did. Mr. Kent also refuses to be guilted out by climate reparations, a loony and unworkable scheme to extort hundreds of billions of dollars from rich countries and send it all to countries such as China. Such candour from Ottawa is a refreshing change from the usual hypocrisy, which began the moment Jean Chrétien committed Canada to the first Kyoto Protocol back in 1998.

Yet even though a global climate deal is now a fantasy, the rhetoric remains as overheated as ever. Without a deal, we're told, the seas will rise, the glaciers will melt, the hurricanes will blow, the forest fires will rage and the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse will do their awful work.

Or maybe not. As Roger Pielke Jr., one of the saner voices on the climate scene, points out, the hurricanes have failed to blow since Hurricane Wilma hit the Gulf Coast back in 2005. Despite the dire predictions of the experts, the U.S. has now experienced its longest period free of major hurricanes since 1906.

It's possible to accept the underlying science of global warming, as Mr. Pielke does, while also maintaining that substantial uncertainties still exist. Why wouldn't they? Climate science is relatively new, and it's also insanely complicated. No one knows with any certainty the exact impact of carbon dioxide emissions, what long-term climate trends will be or the effect of other factors, such as the sun.

But don't take it from me. Take it from the climate scientists themselves.

By no coincidence, a new cache of hacked e-mails from leading climate scientists hit the Internet last week, just in time for the lead-up to the United Nations climate conference in Durban, South Africa. The e-mails are not recent – they are a new instalment in the so-called Climategate affair, which broke two years ago. They deal with a small area of global-warming studies that addresses the question: How do we know the Earth is warmer now than it was 1,000 years ago? The evidence is not straightforward, because it relies on proxy data such as tree rings.

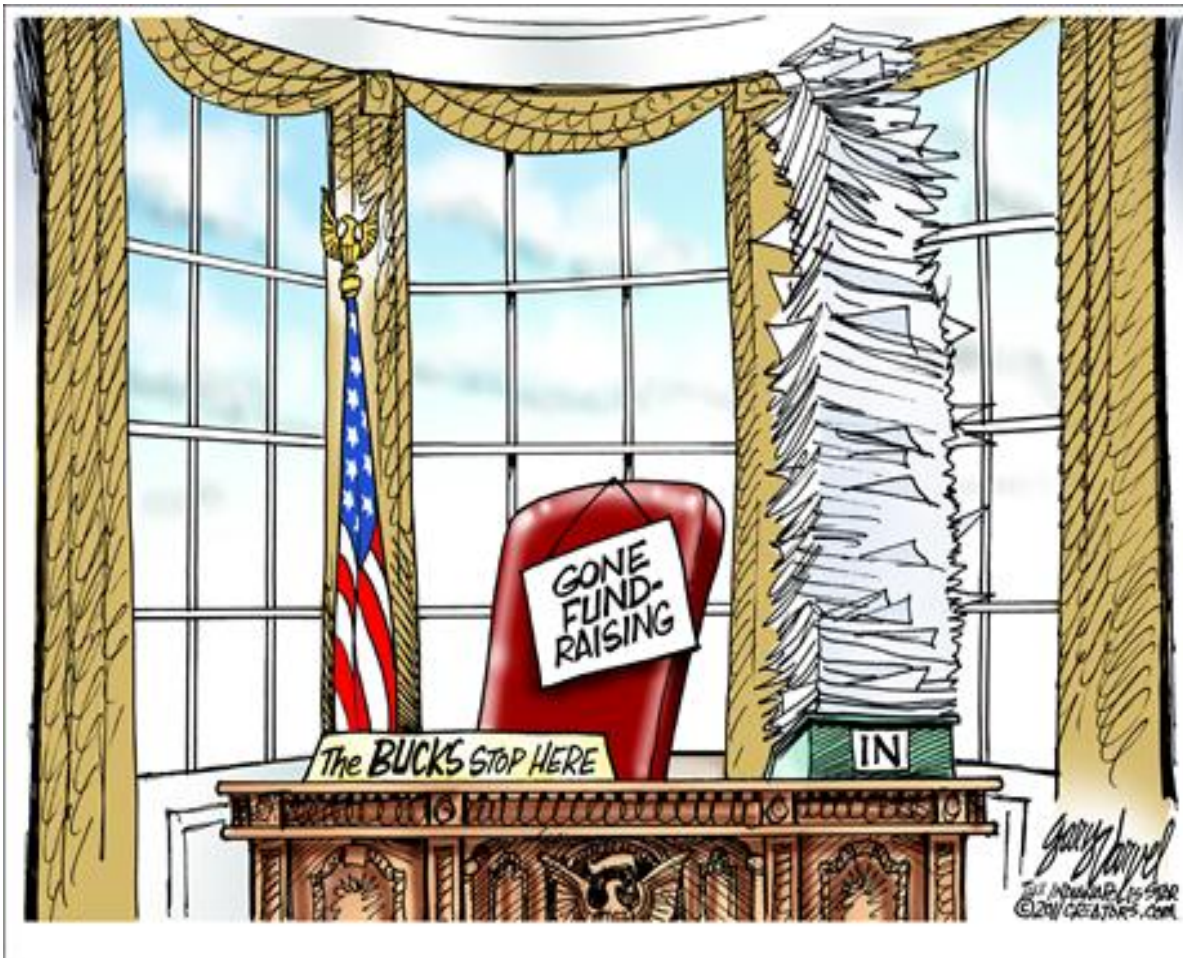
Although Climategate has been widely dismissed as nothing more than the usual academic sniping, it is much more than that. In some of the e-mails, scientists propose ways to massage the data to make it look better. They try to figure out how to get dissident scientists fired. Others are unhappy because they believe important information has been simplified, suppressed or misrepresented for public consumption.

“There have been a number of dishonest presentations of model results by individual authors and by IPCC [the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change],” one scientist complained, also arguing that calculating the climate's sensitivity to increased levels of carbon dioxide “cannot even be done using present-day data.” Another wrote, “I also think the science is being manipulated to put a political spin on it which for all our sakes might not be too clever in the long run.” Or, as another doubter put it, “What if climate change appears to be just mainly a multi-decadal natural fluctuation? They'll kill us probably...”

There's nothing wrong with uncertainty in science. What's wrong is denying it exists. “They were attacking skeptics for questioning the science, but in private, they were questioning it themselves,” Ross McKittrick, an economics professor at the University of Guelph who is a leading climate-science critic, told me. He thinks the entire IPCC process needs to be rebuilt from scratch.

Governments around the world have spent billions on policies to counteract the impact of global warming. They have done so because policy-makers, politicians and the public have been told that the science is built on bedrock. But some of that bedrock turns out to be sand.

Instead of distancing themselves from the shenanigans, the broader climate-science community has treated the central figures in Climategate like persecuted heroes. That is a terrible mistake, because it erodes the credibility of the entire field. The suppression of legitimate debate is a catastrophe for climate science. It's also a catastrophe for science, period.



IRONIC.
50 YEARS AGO,
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TODAY, WE
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