



PoliGraph: Checking Bachmann's debate claims

Posted at 2:20 PM on September 23, 2011 by Catharine Richert

Last night, the GOP presidential candidates met in Orlando, Fla., to debate, and all the candidates were generous with their misstatements, exaggerations and falsehoods.

PoliGraph looks at two claims made by presidential hopeful Rep. Michele Bachmann during the event.

"President Obama has the lowest public approval ratings of any president in modern times."

Currently, Obama's approval rating is around 43 percent, according to several recent polls; the lowest of his term was 41 percent, according to the Roper Center, which collects public opinion data.

Still, Obama's lowest approval rating is higher than every other president before him going back to John F. Kennedy, whose lowest approval rating was 56 percent. The lowest of the last 13 presidents was George W. Bush, who had a 19 percent approval rating in October 2008 - right around the time the economy plummeted.

Bachmann gets this claim wrong.

"This week, a study came out from UBS that said the number-one reason why employers aren't hiring is because of Obamacare."

Bachmann's talking about a recent UBS Investment Research report that says that "arguably the biggest impediment to hiring (particularly hiring of less skilled workers) is healthcare reform."

It doesn't appear that the authors from the financial firm did any sort of formal survey to support the statement, and the report goes on to list 10 other issues, from the expiration to the Bush tax cuts to air pollution rules, that are causing employers to be wary of adding to payrolls.

But the authors of the report give special attention to the health care law, writing that "it impedes employment by systematically raising the price of labor, by making it much

more complicated for small companies to increase payrolls, and by encouraging companies to stay 'under the limit' of 50 employees."

"Under the limit" refers to a new requirement that employers with more than 50 workers must offer health insurance or pay a fine instead. The prospect of the higher cost may be deterring some business owners from hiring, said Michael Tanner, who's a senior fellow with the Cato Institute, a free-market think-tank.

But executives are also worried about tax and regulatory uncertainty, not to mention lagging consumer demand, Tanner said.

"To say [the health care law] is the biggest reason, that's a stretch," he said.

Ken Goldstein, an economist with the Conference Board, agrees with Tanner's point about consumer demand. Employers don't hire when consumers aren't buying and it becomes "a vicious cycle," Goldstein said. "They're both waiting, they're both stuck."

Bachmann cites the report accurately. But it's just one study, and it makes a conclusion about the effect of the health care law on hiring without backing it up with specific data. Economists generally agree that employers aren't hiring for a complicated web of reasons, not primarily the new health care law. As a result, PoliGraph finds the claim misleading.