

Politicians serve up dumbed-down view of government

Aaron Deslatte, May 11, 2012

TALLAHASSEE – Imagine what could happen if politicians trusted voters to make up their own minds about what government can do.

[Democrats](#) sound as if the power of collective action manifested in bureaucratic form can be harnessed to unleash unlimited societal improvement. When it suits them, Republican insist that government is too impotent to stimulate the economy.

The late economist **William Niskanen**, a founder of the [Cato](#) Institute and a member of **President Reagan's** Council of Economic Advisers, once wrote that "Reaganomics" as a program was plagued by disagreements between traditional [Republicans](#) who wanted to cut government spending, and younger "supply-siders" more fixated on cutting tax rates.

A devoted supporter of less government intrusion in markets, Niskanen nonetheless called Reagan's 1980 campaign "grossly misleading" because he never leveled with voters about the deep cuts to programs that would inevitably flow from his policies. Judging from the cognitive dissonance of today's politics, not much has changed.

There are opportunities for our public leaders to be honest with us and debate real government policy in every campaign season. But they always seem to amaze with clever new ways to dumb it down.

Florida U.S. Sen. [Marco Rubio](#) has professed that government doesn't create jobs – and that President [Barack Obama](#) isn't creating them fast enough. Rubio's preferred presidential candidate, [Mitt Romney](#), has said the same for months, but now is slugging it out with the president over who had the better plan for bailing out the auto industry.

Obama's campaign is doing everything possible to avoid discussing the administration's two largest attempts at government intervention in the marketplace: the economic stimulus, and health-care reform.

The rhetoric on both sides is overly broad and simplistic because political consultants don't think you can be trusted to process the nitty-gritty nuances of public policy.

Thus, Gov. [Rick Scott](#) campaigned with a slogan built on getting government "out of the way" while employing the power of the state to override the decisions of the market and create 700,000 jobs.

At an Enterprise Florida meeting in [Jacksonville](#) this week, Scott implored its board to help him reduce the size and scope of government. "I need to know the regulations that are killing jobs. We can't solve it if we don't hear about it," he said. "So, give me all your problems."

At the same time, his jobs team boasted that because of government -- taxpayer-financed economic incentives totaling \$93 million this year -- employers had committed to creating some 21,500 jobs since July. The implication is that without this minuscule intervention by government, these jobs would not have materialized in a state with a \$767 billion Gross State Product.

They singled out the space industry -- which is entirely dependent on government outlays -- as one where successes are beginning to emerge after massive government-induced layoffs caused by the space shuttle's retirement.

Specifically, they said seven space-industry projects had been inked this year, "establishing" 332 jobs that will materialize down the road. When they do, they are projected to pay an average wage of \$61,818, and involve a capital investment of \$112.3 million.

Back when Brevard GOP state Sen. [Mike Haridopolos](#) was vying to take on Democratic U.S. Sen. [Bill Nelson](#), he routinely harped that Nelson and Obama had not done enough to keep shuttle-related engineering and space-related jobs from evaporating.

It would have been an interesting debate, but one the consultants probably would find too dull to engage the masses.

adeslatte@tribune.com or 850-222-5564.