



[Return to the Article](#)

June 28, 2010

Joe Biden's Summer of Love

By [Jeremy Lott](#)

Joe Biden, God bless him, has been sent by the White House to spend the summer talking up the economy. The vice president's efforts may call to mind a bit of mocking verse from a Florence King poem, "We had scrapped the national anthem / To sing 'We're In Recovery,'" but his intent is dead serious. Biden and his handlers understand that the awful state of the American economy presents a thorny problem for their party. With his talk of a "Summer of Recovery," Biden is trying to convince voters going into the midterm elections that the recession was not the Democrats' fault and that their prescriptions will do the job if given more time.

What they are hoping for is something like a replay of the 1982 elections. Going into those midterms, Republicans controlled the White House and held a majority of seats in the Senate. They also enjoyed considerable sway in the House of Representatives, thanks to a bloc of conservative Southern Democrats. John Samples, political scientist at the Cato Institute, wrote in his new book *The Struggle to Limit Government* that the midterms "should have been an unmitigated disaster for the GOP." Consider: "It was held during a severe recession. Unemployment was over 10 percent of the workforce. The election of 1982 focused on the economic policies of the president." (Full disclosure: I used to work for Cato in the media department.)

But the Reagan administration "urged voters to stay the course" and, to a certain extent, Samples argues, it worked. Republicans lost 26 seats in the House and zero in the Senate. It wasn't a walk off grand slam but several economic models had predicted they would lose 50 to 58 seats in the House alone. For the Republicans it was a setback but a minor one. Reagan followed it two years later with a 49-state victory over former Vice President Walter Mondale.

At this point in 2010, things are looking so bad for President Obama's party that a loss of only 26 House seats would be seen as a resounding victory and a slap in the face to obstructionist Republicans and tempestuous tea partiers. If Obama can escape blame for the abysmal state of the economy, the current thinking goes, then his party might escape with only minimal losses.

So Biden has been assigned to make a new push for the effectiveness of the stimulus bill. The other week at a press conference, he said, "Folks, the act is working," and touted some of the benefits of the stimulus package that Congress passed at Obama's urging in 2009. For instance, much of this construction that is lengthening commutes across the country was funded by stimulus dollars. USA Today reported that Biden "went on at some length about how people at kitchen tables across America don't know or care whether new jobs at factories, grocery stores and elsewhere were created because of the Recovery Act,

they just know that jobs are coming back."

But there are good reasons to suspect that this gambit will not work as well for Obama as it did for Reagan. Samples explains that though Reagan's approval rating had slipped leading up to the 1982 elections, a slim majority of voters still approved of the job he was doing. Obama's approval rating is lower. It's in the high 40s according to the RCP Average and some individual polls show him dipping into the low 40s.

Samples also hints at a voter sophistication that does not bode well for the current president's party. According to one survey, only a quarter of respondents expressed "a lot of confidence" in Reagan's ability to set things right, "but only 1 in 10 had the same confidence in the Democrats." And about half of voters thought Reagan's policies "needed more time."

This vote of some confidence was hardly a leap of faith. Reagan had inherited to huge economic problems when he took over the White House: stagnant economic growth mixed with rampant inflation -- known as "stagflation." He had forced through tax and spending cuts to address the first problem and he had backed Fed chairman Paul Volcker's efforts to fight inflation. Voters could see that the efforts to fight inflation, and thus keep the value of their hard earned dollars from being flushed down the toilet, were working. When Reagan was elected in November 1980, inflation was at 12.6 percent. When his party went to the polls two years later, it was at 4.5 percent.

Obama has had no similar success to inspire confidence in voters. The economy isn't bleeding jobs right now but the job market is anemic because the private sector isn't creating enough new jobs. Voters know this. Pew released a poll last week showing the public opinion mountain Biden is trying to climb. At the end of April, only 33 percent of respondents said they thought the "stimulus has helped the job situation," while 62 percent said it had not. Two months later, the most current Pew poll shows those numbers are effectively unchanged at 33 percent and 60 percent, respectively.

Biden last week acknowledged that, though he thought the administration's efforts would do some good, an awful lot of damage has been done. "There's no possibility to restore 8 million jobs lost in the Great Recession," he told an audience of Wisconsin Democrats. (On the same visit to Milwaukee, he called a custard shop manager a "smartass" for suggesting the administration lower taxes.)

The Obama administration constantly calls for more federal stimulus to fund more jobs, but the real problem is the lack of private investment. Biden has a reputation for being long winded (to put it kindly), so the "Summer of Recovery" may be more snooze than pep talk. Regardless, none of Biden's happy talk about the economy will be able to gloss over the fact the Obama administration has really no idea what to do about it.

*Jeremy Lott is an editor for RealClearPolitics and author of *The Warm Bucket Brigade: The Story of the American Vice Presidency*.*

Page Printed from:

**http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2010/06/28/joe_bidens_summer_of_love_106124.html at
June 29, 2010 - 08:47:34 AM CDT**