

Political ‘magical thinking’ avoids solutions

Remember the scandals? Benghazi! The IRS conspiracy! Presidential abuse of power! They raged awhile, but in mid-November suddenly disappeared. Why? The 2014 election is why. For a year or more, conservative politicians had tirelessly striven to alarm and enrage voters into giving them control of both houses of Congress. With the election over, the mission of the scandal-mongers was accomplished. So, after a year or more of groundless accusations and fruitless investigation, congressional committees quietly “determined” the charges of malicious wrongdoing to be baseless—just as the “train wreck” and “job killer” furor about Obamacare from years before was exposed as baseless once that program went into effect.

The conservative faithful had gorged on manufactured outrage they’d been systematically fed for months on end, only to learn the fuss had been staged merely to win political advantage.

So, now that pundits Limbaugh, O’Reilly, Coulter, Krauthammer, *et.al.* and others have once again discredited themselves as either woefully deluded or deliberately deceitful, shouldn’t their audience in turn become genuinely outraged, and switch to more reliable sources whose claims can be independently fact-checked? Of course they should.

But most won’t, for to do so would be to admit their cherished assumptions are flawed. Uncritically ideological minds (whether on the right or the left) choose to hear only what squares with what they already believe, not what they need to know and understand. And the misinformation mill operators know this. So, although the phony “scandals” have been retired now that they’ve served their purpose, we’ll continue to hear more “magical thinking” targeted at those who prefer to base their views on ideology rather than reality.

Despite the strongest rate of job growth since 1999, we’ll continue to hear wailing about “job-killing” regulation.

We'll be urged to give "supply-side economics" one more try, despite that it's already been tried enough to remind the observant that it never works as advertised. Its effect is only to inflate stock prices; it doesn't "trickle down" to create broad demand—the only real incentive for private business to increase production and hiring. So, it never triggers the additional income and tax revenue to compensate for the initial tax breaks to the wealthy.

We'll hear about balancing the federal budget, the sure cure for all economic ills—an idea repeatedly disproved in the 1930s, 1950s, and 1980s. This supposed commonsense notion makes the common error of confusing cause and effect: Though a balanced budget might result from a healthy economy, it can't cause an ailing economy to recover. Any attempt at such backward magic just makes matters worse, making actual balance impossible. Indeed, mandating a balanced federal budget would deny government its primary means to combat destructive economic swings.

We'll hear about "class warfare" between "takers" and "makers"—mainly from the view of the relatively unproductive but wealthy and influential aggressors in that war. Their view ignores that the nation's material wealth is actually produced by the labor and expertise of the long underpaid working and middle classes (the real "makers"). There is a contorted view, in which the tax-sheltered and disproportionately wealthy (the real "takers") magically become "victims."

To the extent that magical thinking pervades an ideology, that ideology embraces the happy notion that reality can be overridden by sheer force of popular opinion. Certainly, magical thinking is fun. But just as certainly, it isn't real. In reality, we must devise real solutions for real problems, and that can't be done by magic. Clearly, more of us need to become better acquainted with reality, to learn to work soberly within its constraints, and to elect leaders able

and determined do likewise. For otherwise, we resign ourselves and our nation to decline in an increasingly competitive world.

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