

# Elections 2010

by **Edwin D. Reilly, Jr.**  
for the Sunday Gazette

“Hoover is certainly a wonder. I wish we could make him President; there could not be a better one.”

--Franklin Roosevelt, 1920.

“Given the chance to go forward with the policies of the last eight years, we shall soon with the help of God, be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation”

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—Herbert Hoover, Inaugural Address, 1929

I have Herbert Hoover on my mind as I write because a few weeks ago, in the one-minute snippet of Rush Limbaugh that I deigned to listen to, he referred to our President as “Barack Hoover Obama.” This was a pernicious slur on two good men. Hoover was in office for only the first 11 months of my life, so I barely remember him in that capacity. He has been judged a failed President, but he was a great humanitarian who led several worldwide relief efforts during the two World Wars. He should also be fondly remembered locally for having offered financial support for restoration of the magnificent home-laboratory of Charles Proteus Steinmetz on Wendell Avenue. If our locals had matched that support, the home would have been saved but, alas, that didn’t happen and it was razed in 1938.

The charge against Hoover as President is that although the Black Tuesday stock market crash of October 29, 1929 occurred just seven months after his inauguration, he did little or nothing to try to stem the rise of unemployment from 6 to 30 percent over the remaining three and a half years of his term. There were no Hoover stimuli; he had a firm belief in the alleged self-correcting tendency of the free market to correct itself. The unemployed camped in “Hooverilles” all over the country, and the man who thought he would be a great President defeated him handily in 1932.

I tried to vote that year, but at the age of 0.6 year I was too short to reach the levers. (OK, the truth is that they sent me home and told me that I could drink at 18 and vote at 21, precisely the reverse of the present day rule in New York State.)

FDR’s New Deal was one stimulus after another, each costing from 5 to 7 percent of GNP, and the unemployment rate had been halved by the time of his reelection landslide of 1936. But it took the World War II stimulus to really end the Great Depression. In 1944, with 16 million men under arms and so many women going to work on the home front, unemployment had dropped to a miniscule 1.2 percent.

So how comparable are the statistics in the era of Barack Obama? Well, with unemployment rising from 4 percent in 2000, the year George W. Bush was (s)elected, to 7.5 percent by the end of his second term and thence to 9.0 percent by mere 70 days after President Obama was inaugurated, the rate seems to have stabilized at 9.5%., 0.2% less than at the comparable time in Ronald Reagan’s first term. And Reagan was easily reelected two years later.

Stabilization was not good enough for most people as of Election Day; they had wanted a virtually instant miracle. The late-term Bush TARP stimulus and the early term Obama stimulus together were not enough to bring unemployment down to single digits because the sums appropriated were only about 5% of GNP, nowhere near the percentage of Gross National Product (GNP) that was necessarily appropriated for World War II, a whopping 44% of GNP.

Economics is often called the “dismal science,” and we have, just barely, survived the most dismal political campaign of my memory. Perhaps it was doomed from the beginning because of the Supreme Court’s startling January 21, 2010 decision in the Citizens United case that corporations are “persons” with the right to make unlimited and undocumented donations to political candidates even though human persons may make only limited, documented contributions. The influx of money was not enough to save the worst of the Tea Party candidates, Sharron Angle of Nevada and Christine O’Donnell of Delaware, but it certainly helped swell the usual gain of 33 or so House seats by the party out of power two years after a Presidential election to almost twice that many.

The other big factor in the Congressional election was the degree to which the GOP demonized both House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the Congressmen who voted for what they sneeringly call “Obamacare.” This happened because national Democrats are, in general, bad, really bad, politicians, feeble on offense, utterly incapable of defense against outrageous charges. Republicans, in contrast, are masters of the craft. Their bumper sticker is only about five inches wide, containing just the single word “NO.” The Democratic bumper sticker is five feet wide and ends with “continued on the next bumper sticker.”\*

The worst TV ads of the season showed Photoshopped images of opponents made to look like monsters, and these weren’t even confined to Halloween. At the very least, candidates should be forbidden to use images of their opponents without permissions that they are unlikely to obtain.

Judicial candidates are allowed to tout their own credentials but may not attack their opponents. Oh that we could impose the same standard on candidates for every office. Those who opt to create instant self-negative videos as Carl Paladino did by dickering with Dicker, be our guests. We are entitled to some entertainment during dismal season.

\* An elaboration on a similar statement of Senator Al Franken.

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