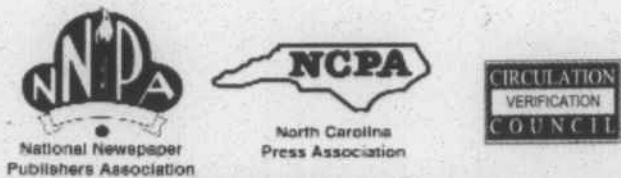


OPINION/ FORUM

THE CHRONICLE 36 Years

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Debilitating Diversions



Julianne Malveaux
 Guest Columnist

What do Congressional representatives Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL), and Steny Hoyer (D-MD) have in common? Each of them has taken time to comment on the predicament of New York Congressman Anthony Weiner, but none of them

has mentioned the fact that the average unemployed person has now (as of May) been out of work for a whopping 40 weeks. Somehow, our Democratic leaders have allowed themselves to get caught up in the minutiae of the misadventures of their clearly disturbed colleague, without referencing the economic disturbances that too many Americans are living through. Should they have said nothing and risk the ire of Republicans? Probably not. But I'd have liked to hear Congressional leaders say that Mr. Weiner's problems are simply not the nation's most pressing problems. As Congressman Charles Rangel (D-NY) mentioned, Weiner's actions, however reprehensible, are not law breaking. But there ought to be a law against fiddling while Rome burns, running our economy into the ground and doing absolutely nothing about it.



U.S. Rep. Weiner

President Obama is being blamed for this economy, and he is in the position of attempting to fight a war without any weapons. With stimulus, he could do more job creation, but with a debt ceiling looming (and no action taken on that) there is no money for job creation. Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben Bernanke has little to offer – the federal funds rate is so low that he can't dare lower it again, and the Quantitative Easing (QE2) program designed to pump \$600 billion in the economy is coming to a close with \$50 billion of Treasury Bills being purchased this month. All President Obama and Chairman Bernanke are left with are the bully pulpit, the microphone, and the power to urge the private sector to get involved in job creation. There are no more policy tools to stimulate job creation, yet this is our nation's most pressing problem. If Democrats don't watch out, the whole lot of them will be turned out from Congress a year or so from now. Yet, leaders have been caught up in debilitating distractions instead of essential urgencies.

Dr. Ron Daniels, of the institute of the Black World, has referenced "non urgent emergencies." His comments quite clearly capture the national condition. We are in economic crisis, but paralyzed by partisanship, unable to deal with it. Instead, we are caught up in the minutiae that emerge from the 24-hour news cycle and by our own prurient curiosity about other people's business.

It is tempting to blame the debilitating distractions on the media, but the fact is that "the media" is as capitalistically driven as every other institution in our nation. If we didn't watch garbage, they would not broadcast garbage. If we collectively said that we are not interested in those members of Congress who behave badly personally, focusing more importantly on those who behave badly professionally, the media would let it go. Congressman Weiner ought to be the fodder of the late night talk shows that feature comedians like Jay Leno and Conan O'Brien, not serious conversations on programs like "Meet the Press."

I am far more disturbed about the state of our economy than I am about these men behaving badly. After all, don't we get at least one every season? And don't we spend millions of dollars (see John Edwards) attempting to indict those with poor judgment, instead of using those millions, perhaps, to generate some jobs. What if we put all of the debilitating distractions on "never mind"? What if we failed to be titillated by grown folks acting like adolescents, and instead got agitated by the economic challenges so many of our fellow Americans face.

If you have a job, can you imagine being unemployed for 40 weeks? Forty weeks is almost 10 months; about the same amount of time it takes for someone to gestate a baby. Most people don't have enough savings to take them through 40 weeks of unemployment, so how do they survive? Suppose these were the stories that led the news, not this Weiner thing. Come on, people! Can't we get our priorities straight? If we made the economy a populist issue, our Congress would feel more motivated to deal with it.

I am not suggesting any abdication of morality, but I am suggesting that there is a morality that says we should feed the hungry, clothe the naked, employ the jobless, house the homeless. This is the essential morality, the Biblical morality that says we should treat others the way we would like to be treated. That means we must look at those who are economically disadvantaged with more scrutiny than we choose to look at those who are woefully and publicly morally flawed.

Economist Julianne Malveaux is president of Bennett College for Women.



Voting Rights in Danger



Kayla Vaughn
 Guest Columnist

Speaking as both a concerned citizen and an intern for Democracy NC, a non-partisan organization, I am worried. I am worried that my voting rights, as a North Carolina citizen, are being tested and, for some people, completely stripped away. Over the years, North Carolina has been a leader for progressive legislation; a place where both human and citizen's rights have been continuously fought for. And as this General Assembly continues to introduce, propose and support harmful legislation, all of the hard work that has been put forth to achieve a more just state, is being tested, immensely.

The current voting laws in North Carolina are under attack by legislation that force voters to present a government-issued photo ID when they vote, put a stop to Sunday voting, reduce the hours and days of Early Voting, stop both Same-Day Registration and pre-registration for teens, and end the NC public campaign fund. The main groups of people that are being directly affected by this legislation are African Americans, younger voters, low-income voters, women and seniors (other than the seniors, most of which already come out to the polls in very small numbers). The majority of this legislation is disenfranchising key Democratic voters, and making it more difficult for all people to cast their vote.

Accordingly, legislators seem to still feel the need to waste money on projects and bills that are not necessary, despite the economic situation in NC and the many

projects being cut from the budget. The Photo ID bill is just one example of the bad legislation that has been proposed that is a clear waste of millions of tax payers' dollars. Those who proposed and supported this piece of legislation argued that there was a significant amount of voter fraud that needed combating, but in reality, voter fraud in North Carolina is VERY rare. Plus, currently there are already laws in North Carolina that protect voters from voter fraud that has been very successful, which only decreases the need for this legislation even more. This legislation was introduced on false pretenses, and it will only negatively impact the voters of North Carolina – at the voting booth and in their pockets.

This is not the only piece of legislation that is regressive and hurtful for North Carolina voters. As a North Carolina citizen, I want to make sure that the citizens being affected by this legis-

lation – the 450,000 NC citizens being disenfranchised by the photo ID bill, the 37,000 citizens that rely on Sunday voting, the potential education that young voters could be receiving to increase their desire to be active citizens, and the potential candidates who cannot afford their campaign – are protected and keep the current rights and liberties that they have as a citizen. And it is imperative that NC citizens realize, even if they do not make up one of these groups that are being directly affected, that they will be affected by these outrageous pieces of legislation that are a direct attack on our current, progressive voting laws.

Kayla Vaughn, a High Point University student, is an intern with Democracy NC, which, according to its Web site, is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to representing the best interests of the people of North Carolina.

The Latest Right-Wing Lie



George Curry
 Guest Columnist

Give conservatives credit: They have a loud echo chamber. It usually begins with a lie or, at best, a clever distortion, and the rest of the right-wing crowd are immediately off to the races. The most recent example is the assertion that President Obama made the economy worse.

That point was advanced in a Wall Street Journal column by Peggy Noonan, a former speechwriter for Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and, briefly, George W. Bush.

Fox, the network that likes to blame all bad things on Obama all the time, was quick to amplify what is certain to be a GOP campaign theme in 2012. Bill O'Reilly, host of "The O'Reilly Factor" on Fox, argued Peggy Noonan's point against resident liberal Alan Colmes [June 7].

O'REILLY: ... For you to sit there and say the Obama administration has not made it worse --

COLMES: They made it better.

O'REILLY: -- is for you to just ignore the statistics.

Clearly, Bill O'Reilly is the one ignoring the statistics.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO), in a report issued last month on the effectiveness of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, noted that President Obama's economic stimulus plan had helped local and state governments by raising federal matching funds under Medicaid and increased funding for transportation projects.

The stimulus program also provided tax relief for



President Barack Obama addresses Chief of Staff Bill Daley during a fiscal policy meeting last month at the White House.

individuals and businesses, increased business write-offs and helped people in need by extending and expanding unemployment benefits as well as increasing benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Food Stamps program.

According to the CBO, the stimulus program had the following effects in the first quarter of 2011:

- Raised real (inflation-adjusted) gross domestic product (GDP) between 1.1 percent and 3.1 percent.

- Lowered the unemployment rate between 0.6 percentage points and 1.8 percentage points.

- Increased the number of people employed between 1.2 million and 3.4 million.

- Increased the number of full-time equivalent jobs by 1.6 million to 4.6 million compared with what would have happened otherwise.

The Center on Policy and Budget Priorities, an independent think tank in Washington, D.C., noted that economic activity as measured by inflation-adjust-

ed gross domestic product (GDP) was contracting when the financial stabilization bill known as the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act were enacted. Since then, however, the economy has grown for seven straight quarters.

Media Matters, the watchdog group, observed: "Economists also agreed that the stimulus was effective. A March 2010 study in the Wall Street Journal found that 70 percent of economists surveyed said the stimulus 'boosted growth and mitigated job losses.' ABC News reported on February 18, 2010, that most of the economists on its panel thought the economy 'would be worse today without the big aid package.' And a February 2010 survey of 203 members of the National Association for Business Economics (NABE) found that 'eighty-three percent believe that GDP is currently higher than it would have been without the 2009 stimulus package.'"

Those are the statistics that Bill O'Reilly chooses to ignore.

None of this campaign to blame Obama for everything wrong in America should be surprising. It is part of a pattern by conservatives: Make up an outrageous lie – such as the President was not born in the United States and is therefore unqualified to hold office – keep repeating that lie over and over until a large segment of ill-informed people believe it and even when the lie is proven to be a lie, continue claiming it is the truth while you make up yet another lie.

Perhaps we should send O'Reilly and the folks at Fox News the lyrics to Sunshine Anderson's "Heard it all before: 'Heard it all before. All of ya lies... But your lies ain't working now.'"

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator and media coach. He can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com.