THE PERILS OF THE PORKALOOZA

Shortly after a Quinnipiac University poll reported July 7 that President Barack Hussein Obama's job approval rating in Ohio had fallen 13 percentage points in two months to 49%, the White House dispatched Vice President Joe Biden to that crucial swing state to defend the administration's efforts to deal with the economic crisis.

This was a mistake, for two reasons.

The first is that almost every journalist reporting on the vice president's speech would feel compelled to reference the Quinnipiac poll. This, noted Jim Geraghty of National Review Online, is "hanging a lantern" on the problem.

The second is that Joe Biden is a motormouth, liable to say anything. The White House slapped him down after Mr. Biden said on ABC's "This Week" program July 5 the administration had "misread how bad the economy was." (When asked about the vice president's remark, Mr. Obama said there is nothing he would have done differently.)

Speaking in Cincinnati to a crowd of "about 200," some of them protesters, Mr. Biden asked for patience. "Remember we're only 140 days into this deal," he said. "It's supposed to take 18 months."

This isn't what Mr. Obama and his aides were saying in February. Back then we were told the $787 billion stimulus bill had to be rushed through Congress to keep unemployment from rising to eight percent.

"No one in the House read that bill because the urgency was such that the president said we had to act now and if we acted now, we would stave off job loss and we'd get America back to work," recalled Rep. Eric Cantor, (R-VA), the GOP Whip.

At an elaborate signing ceremony in Denver Feb. 17, Mr. Obama said the stimulus bill would "create or save" 3.5 million jobs, starting right away. He also said then he expected to held accountable for results.

With unemployment in June at 9.5 percent, and with the president himself now acknowledging the unemployment rate is likely to exceed ten percent before year's end, it's pretty bizarre for Mr. Obama to say, as he did in his radio address Saturday, that the stimulus bill "has worked as intended."

A report from New Hampshire suggests why the stimulus bill hasn't stimulated the economy much.

According to the state office responsible for tracking the funds, New Hampshire has received so

far $413.6 million in stimulus funds, which have resulted in the creation of 50 jobs, all in government, most of them temporary and only 34 of them full time.

That comes to a cost of $8.32 million per job, or nearly $10 million per full time job, if we assume that two of the part time jobs equal one full time job.

No genius was required to see the stimulus wasn't going to work, because it consisted mostly of pork barrel projects of such dubious merit that not even a Democratic Congress was likely to have approved them if they hadn't been bundled together to reduce scrutiny, and rushed through under the guise of an emergency.

As Mr. Obama's chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, put it: "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste."

Last February, I called the stimulus bill the porkalooza, and predicted it would define Mr. Obama's presidency, even shorten it.

"As more details of what's in (the stimulus bill) become known, already tepid support will cool further," I wrote then. "And if the economy doesn't turn around, support for the president will plummet."

I'm more scornful of the porkalooza than ever, but I'm glad now that it passed. That's because the porkalooza "only" wastes great gobs of money. The president's plans to nationalize health care and to impose a "cap and trade" system have serious implications for our liberty as well as our solvency.

But because of the massive debt Mr. Obama is running up with the porkalooza, his nationalization of Chrysler and General Motors, and his proposed budget for the next fiscal year, popular enthusiasm for trillion dollar spending programs has pretty much dried up.

And because the president's claims for the porkalooza have turned out to be so wrong (or so disingenuous), people are wary of the promises he's making about health care reform and energy policy.

Sometimes, Rahm Emanuel, it's better to solve a crisis than to take advantage of it.

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