

## It's Not a 'Stimulus' Bill By L. BRENT BOZELL III

Must we always fight Washington policy wars using preferred Democrat terms? Today's example is the "stimulus package," or as ABC touts on screen during its newscasts, the Obama "Rescue Plan," as if the new president was donning Ronald Reagan's lifeguard uniform and pulling the economy out of the surf. Despite the dominant media terms, liberals like those at the Huffington Post are complaining the Democrats aren't effectively resisting "as Republicans seek to tar it as a 'spending bill."

Only in the world of politics does one "tar" an issue by calling a spending bill a spending bill. But Republicans and conservative activists are doing more than that. They're denouncing the bill's enormous size – larger than the combined cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan up until now! They're also focusing on how it's light on actual "stimulus" items and heavy on grants pleasing traditional Democrat special interest groups.

Economist and blogger Robert Brusca estimated that only about 24 percent of the spending in the Senate plan can be categorized accurately as "stimulus," and the rest is either "cushion" for the hard times, or categorized as "agenda" spending, advancing Democratic policy dreams. Even the stimulus is delayed, he quipped: "Does the administration go to Hallmark and buy us taxpayers a belated stimulus card?...This is no Muhammad Ali plan (float like a butterfly, sting like a bee). It's more like float like a lead balloon, bite like a flea."

Bloggers at the Family Research Council have been organizing all the "stimulus" silliness in the bill, as are other detail-oriented conservatives. The silly items Obama pushed them to yank – subsidies for contraceptives and new sod patches for the National Mall – are not atypical. Let's start with \$3 billion for "prevention and wellness programs, including \$335 million for "education and prevention" of sexually transmitted diseases. FRC reports that recent government expenditures in this area include a transgender beauty pageant in San Francisco that advertised available HIV testing. Then there was the event called "Got Love? -- Flirt/Date/Score" that taught how "to flirt with greater finesse." Does this strike anyone as a plan to jump-start the economy, instead of someone's sex life?

The Senate (and the House) somehow think it's a "stimulus" provision to give an additional \$50 million to the National Endowment for the Arts. Kiff Gallagher, a former Clinton staffer, protested to the Los Angeles Times that the arts "get the shaft" in spending battles because their impact seems fuzzy. "But the new president shows that a higher social, empathic intelligence is required to solve hard-core issues."

If we have enough "empathic intelligence," we might imagine how we fix the mortgage-banking mess with more spending on the ballet. On the tax-cut side, the Senate bill included a tax break worth up to \$246 million over 11 years for outside investors in big-budget Hollywood movie projects. "Tax cuts for the wealthy" are okay – as long as the wealthy are making movies. But bad publicity and pork-busting Sen. Tom Coburn pressed the Senate (including 13 Democrats) to scrap the tax break.

The "green" lobby is thrown a pile of bones in the "stimulus" bill, including \$10 million for bike and walking trails, \$200 million for plug-in electric car stations, \$400 million for climate change research by NASA scientists, \$600 million to buy new "green" cars for government workers, \$800 million for more cleanup of "Superfund" pollution sites, and \$1.5 billion for the construction of new "green" school buildings.

Then there's just plain self-dealing by the Democrats. The Washington Times reported on a \$2.25 billion provision in the House bill for the National Parks – almost equal to the National Park Service's total yearly budget, and a eyebrow-raising increase of almost three times the \$802 million the Senate Appropriations Committee put in its "stimulus" bill. The chief lobbyist for the National Parks Conservation Association is Craig Obey, the son of House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey.

There's a reason why the Obama administration wanted to cram this massive spending bill through the Congress by Abe Lincoln's birthday. Speed is of the essence: the longer it lingers, the more details emerge, proving this egg is rotten to the core. Republicans are now using those details to build skepticism about this freight train of partisan pork.

Standing in their way are TV news anchors, miffed that the GOP would "turn the cold shoulder" to Obama's outreach, as Charles Gibson put it on ABC. His man on Capitol Hill, Jonathan Karl, added: "So much for the President's charm offensive. Today it was all partisan rancor and name-calling."

The news media are supposed to be offering us information from Washington. In the case of this "stimulus" bill, it's the last thing they want to do.

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