

## **Obama's 'hope and change' now is hopelessness and stagnation**

---

**ANTONY DAVIES & JAMES R. HARRIGAN** | Saturday, Dec. 26, 2015, 9:00 p.m.

---

Christmas is a time of hope, and the New Year is a time of change, which makes this a good time to assess what's happened since President Obama rode the wave of hope and change to the White House in 2008.

A sober reflection of the past seven years shows that, across the country, change largely has been for the worse and hope is in pretty short supply.

The hope disappeared down the hole of governmental regulation.

Regulations that prevent corporations from imposing harm on people are one thing, but we have reached the point where nearly every aspect of American life is wholly regulated. One need only look to licensure requirements to see how onerous it has become.

In the 1950s, one U.S. job in 20 required some form of government license. Today, it is one in three. And that is simply the licensing required to perform a job. The government also regulates when, for whom and where jobs can be performed.

For entrepreneurs, the government requires taxes over and above what would be paid when working for someone else. Run afoul of any of the regulations — or pay the wrong amount of tax — and you risk losing the license you need to perform your job.

How bad is it?

The number of pages in the Code of Federal Regulations (the compilation of all permanent federal regulations) has grown by nearly 15 percent during the Obama administration. As of today, the number of federal regulations that control our lives fills 200,000 pages — and that doesn't include state and local regulations.

What hope can people have to improve their lives when the government devotes nearly a quarter of a million pages of text to detailing all the things they cannot do?

The effects show in our employment numbers.

Before the Great Recession, more than 80 percent of the working-age population was employed. Today, just 78 percent is. That difference doesn't seem like much, but it amounts to more than 5 million jobless Americans who have been unemployed for so long that the Bureau of Labor Statistics no longer counts them as unemployed.

Counting those people, the actual unemployment rate stands at 8.2 percent, not the 5.1 percent the government claims.

That is the epitome of hopelessness.

The purveyor of hope and change in the White House didn't stop there, though.

You might recall his multiple promises of ending America's foreign wars and of closing Guantanamo Bay. Those things haven't changed all that much, either. There is little hope they will.

The president has another year to pull it all together, and in that year, if he wants to reclaim his mandate of hope and change, he might consider a core truth:

The right thing for government to do in almost every case is nothing — because the more it does, the less the people can do.

This will be a bitter pill for President Obama to swallow. But history bears it out repeatedly. If he cannot fathom the idea of doing nothing, then he can turn his attention to rolling back the regulation that is suffocating the American economy.

Contrary to what politicians think, government is almost never the source of hope or change.

Antony Davies is associate professor of economics at Duquesne University. James R. Harrigan is director of academic programs at Strata in Logan, Utah.