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## Brookings Institution's Bill Antholis Maintains that Lack of Clarity in Obama Agenda is Holding Up Investment and Job Creation.



**K**icking off his nationally syndicated "Neal Asbury's Truth for America Show" on WZAB-AM, Neal Asbury opened the show by proclaiming: "We want to feel good again about this country. We want our mojo back." He pointed to the staggering unemployment rate of nearly 30 percent (factoring those on unemployment; those who have stopped looking; and workers holding down "shadow jobs" where they are working part-time or are overqualified, over educated and underpaid for their current job). He likened this unemployment rate to those of developing nations.

"Jobs are the cause of this country's insecurity. The stimulus package was a failure, and Obama initiatives like cap and trade, card check and the health care

plan are job killers, not job creators. If I was running for office, I would have job creation tattooed on my forehead and ask that every other politician do the same," said Asbury.

He added that incumbents should beware in November because people don't think this system is working and they want to see a change.

Joining the show for a return visit was William J. Antholis, Managing Director of The Brookings Institution. In that capacity, he works directly with Brookings's President and Vice Presidents to help manage the full range of policy studies, develop new initiatives, coordinate research across programs, strengthen the policy impact of Brookings research, and ensure the quality and independence of that research.

Antholis lead the conversation by explaining The Brookings Institution's "How We're Doing Index," which takes a look at significant trends and indicators. The index was started a year and one-half ago to examine the surge in Iraq, and then was applied to the aftermath of Katrina.

While it measures a number of indicators, it concentrates on three main themes

based on the preamble to the Constitution: provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty.

The current index is overshadowed by the economy, which Antholis said is leading to "political consternation. If I'm running for office the last person I want to be is an incumbent. And that isn't just Democrats – it's all incumbents." Antholis credits the Tea Party with some of this, but he believes the backlash against incumbents should help Republicans take back the House, and the Senate isn't secure to maintain the Democratic majority.

Incumbents that Antholis thinks are in danger are Diane Feinstein, Barbara Boxer, Harry Reid and others in Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

The restlessness by voters should increase voter turnout, which is traditionally low for midterm elections. But Antholis believes that a new found passion by



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voters in both parties will energize the voting process.

No matter the outcome of the election, voters will want to see how the government will deal with the fiscal deficit. When the new budget commission comes out with its recommendations people will be paying attention and will want action.

"Americans will have to ask themselves if they can accept tax cuts with more spending. If they have to bite the bullet, which bullet will they have to bite," asked Antholis. "We're living beyond our means and we have to stop it."

The economy and unemployment are creating anxiety and are slowing down investment, because businesses are looking for some clarity, according to Antholis.

Antholis believes this lack of clarity is contributing to President Obama's plummeting approval ratings, even among independents, where ratings fell by 17 percent last year.

But according to Antholis, the President's biggest misstep was not doing enough to promote bipartisanship. He gives Obama high marks for entering office by putting two Republicans in his cabinet. But that bipartisanship quickly evaporated when

Obama was unwilling to let Republicans share some credit for passing large policy initiatives. For example, he missed opportunities on the healthcare bill when some Republicans initially were willing to work with him.

"You can't put a label on American voters as conservatives. They're not conservatives, they're cautious. Obama should have spent more time getting people to believe in government again, as he did in his nomination acceptance speech. Now he has raised such high expectations for bipartisanship that he gave Republicans an open invitation to weigh in on every issue," said Antholis.

If you had to give Obama a grade on his three major promises, Antholis gives him a flunking grade on the energy bill because he didn't reach out enough to politicians on both sides of the aisle that had an open mind and were willing to work on a compromise.

The education bill has not even left the gate, but Antholis thinks that it will make a reemergence after the midterm. The "No Child Left Behind" Act may make a come back

On the healthcare bill, Antholis is really disappointed that Obama did not get more personally involved in negotiations, but left it to Democratic leaders in the House and

Senate to get bipartisan support. Though it passed, it remains a highly contentious issue.

Antholis proclaimed the Cap and Trade climate bill officially dead. "The discourse over Cap and Trade is so great that nothing can be done to revive it. It was a great lost opportunity."

According to Antholis, the immigration reform bill is "not going to happen." A big part of the problem is that most Americans do not understand that economic growth has come to the US from educated immigrants, which possess that traditional entrepreneurial spirit.

As a result of the storm over immigration policy, Antholis notes that Obama has experienced a significant loss of support among Hispanic voters, who voted in large numbers for him. He is mystified by the drop in support, and points to approval ratings of only 59 percent among Hispanics.



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