

The Romney [website](#) portrays regulation as a huge drag on the economy. But it can't decide who's to blame. Is it all Obama's fault? Or not just Obama, but a whole succession of Presidents, many of them presumably Republicans? Or is it bureaucrats who have overpowered all of these Presidents? The website goes around in circles, embracing each of these theories even though they contradict each other.

The website begins by placing the blame on developments during successive Presidencies — presumably that includes at least Obama and Bush, since “successive” implies at least two in a row. (Poor W, now taking the rap for having a pro-regulation Administration!)

But the website has another theory, too, which contradicts the first one. According to this second theory, the problem isn't caused by Presidents at all, not even Obama. Instead, the root of the problem is that “federal agencies today have near plenary power to issue whatever regulations they see fit” with “little or no presidential oversight.” Presidents aren't really to blame, then.

But the website doesn't stick to this theory. It says that the worst example of bad regulation is the “Obama administration's war on carbon dioxide.” Note that now it's Obama's fault, not the bureaucracy's.

The website even combines conflicting explanations in the course of a single sentence. In explaining the need to revisit decades of accumulated regulation, the website says this: “One of the greatest problems with the federal bureaucracy is that each incoming presidential administration leaves in place much of what its predecessor constructed.” Notice the contradiction— the layers of regulation were “constructed” by successive Presidential administrations, not by the bureaucracy — but this is supposed to be a problem “with the bureaucracy,” not with the Presidents who created all the layers.

What's behind all this confusion? Why not just blame it all on Obama and promise to roll back his regulations?

The heart of the problem is that website promises Romney will permanently shackle the regulatory state, not just deal with the last few years worth of regs. This requires insisting that the problem goes deeper than Obama. Blaming recent Presidents would include Bush, who wasn't notably pro-regulatory. So the bureaucracy is an appealing target — after all, no one likes bureaucrats.

But then the website starts going around in a circle. If it's just the bureaucrats, then the new regs can't be blamed on Obama, the guy Romney's running against. So it must be Obama's fault. But that wouldn't go deep enough to justify his proposed reforms, so the fault must lie with a *succession* of presidential administrations. But that won't sell well because the targets aren't appealing, so then we're back to the bureaucrats. But then that would deflect blame from Obama, so . . . And around and around we go.

All of this contortion is necessary because website can't speak plainly. The main reason for current regulations is simple: Congress passed laws that place a higher priority on public health and environmental quality than on cost. The website talks about regulatory budgets and greater consideration of costs — but these are code words. What they really mean is that making an omelet (a good business environment) means breaking eggs (more risks to public health and the environment). But it would be impolitic to say this openly.

Thus the circular blame game.