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## Experts Date It to Bush; Bush Says It Was Clinton's

By *Dana Milbank*

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The Bush administration, irked that the official arbiter of recessions continues to say the current downturn began on President Bush's watch, has unilaterally changed the official start of the recession to the last months of the Clinton administration.

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A new Bush campaign ad released this week proclaims: "January 2001. The challenge: an economy in recession." This backs up the claim often made by Bush and top aides that they "inherited" an economic recession.

The only trouble with this assertion is the nonpartisan National Bureau of Economic Research, which does the official dating of recessions, says the downturn began in March 2001 -- early in Bush's presidency. NBER is examining revised economic statistics to see if the official date should be moved earlier, but spokeswoman Donna Zerwitz said there is "nothing imminent."

This inconvenience, however, did not stop the White House Council of Economic Advisers. In their annual report last month, the president's economists argued that "revisions since the NBER made its decision for the most recent recession strongly suggest that the business-cycle peak was before March 2001." As a result, the CEA decided to "use the fourth quarter of 2000 as the peak of economic activity and the start of the recession."

Evidence since the CEA made its claim has been mixed; the Bureau of Labor Statistics has said employment peaked in March 2001, not February, as it has previously thought. And the CEA's credibility has since been undermined by Bush's refusal to endorse the council's hugely optimistic claim that the economy will add 2.6 million jobs this year.

Bush campaign spokesman Terry Holt said the ad was not suggesting that the recession had begun by January, but that many economic troubles greeted the president shortly after he took office. But Vice President Cheney, on Fox News this week, said: "We inherited a recession, a recession that began either shortly before or about the same time that we got into office."

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Vice President Cheney on the nation's economy: "We inherited a recession." (Ricky Carioti -- The Washington Post)

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The NBER may, someday, endorse the Bush view, but Zerwitz said it will not be pressured. "For us, this is an academic exercise, not a political one," she said.

**RNC Dons 18 Wheels to Track Voters**

Coming soon to a mall near you: Reggie the Registration Rig.

The Republican National Committee announced that it plans to send an 18-wheeler it has christened "Reggie" across the country beginning Saturday, to sign up voters.

The truck -- decked out with computers, plasma screen televisions and, oddly enough, the video game system Xbox, among other accoutrements -- will stop at college campuses, state fairs, malls and other venues, wooing potential voters.

"It's a mobile, state-of-the-art voter registration program on wheels," said Christine Iverson, a spokeswoman for the party. "We want to make it as easy as possible for people to vote. So rather than bringing people to the courthouse or to one of the places where they would traditionally go to register to vote, we will bring voter registration to them."

The party, which is coordinating the effort with local drives around the country, hopes to register 1 million voters next week. But, Iverson said, "Reggie" will continue to criss-cross the country for the rest of this election season as the party tries to register 3 million voters by Election Day.




*Political researcher Brian Faler contributed to this report.*

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