



Obama's Political 'Price-Gouging'

If any doubts existed about whether the Justice Department is just "an arm of the administration," they were dispelled by the attorney general's announcement that he is forming, at the president's request, a new working group to investigate "price gouging" at the gas pump ("[White House's Task Force to Probe Oil, Gas Markets](#)," U.S. News, April 22).

Oddly enough, this "working group" will come under the auspices of the Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force, which was constituted to prevent fraud in the financial and lending markets. Not only would the group duplicate the functions of existing agencies—namely the Federal Trade Commission, which through Congress-enacted legislation and its own market manipulation rule, is already empowered to investigate and prevent "price gouging," and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, with which the FTC has a memorandum of understanding to implement the rule—but it is blatantly political. It comes on the heels of the president's April 4 announcement that he is running for re-election. By contrast, members of Congress in March sent a bipartisan letter to the FTC asking for a report on its efforts, under its Congress-mandated authority to investigate "price-gouging" associated with the recent run-up in gas prices.

When the FTC issued its "price-gouging" rule in August 2009, Commissioner William Kovacic warned that the rule could and would be perverted to serve political ends. Lamentably those of us who voted for it did not heed his warning.

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