

Obama Sets Campaign Theme

President: Middle Class At Stake

BY KEN THOMAS AND BEN FELLER
Associated Press

OSAWATOMIE, Kan. — Declaring the American middle class in jeopardy, President Barack Obama on Tuesday outlined a populist economic vision that will drive his re-election bid, insisting the United States must reclaim its standing as a country in which everyone can prosper if provided “a fair shot and a fair share.”

While never making an overt plea for a second term, Obama's offered his most comprehensive lines of attack against the candidates seeking to take his job, only a month before Republican voters begin choosing a presidential nominee. He also sought to inject some of the long-overshadowed hope that energized his 2008 campaign, saying: “I believe America is on its way up.”

In small-town Osawatimie, in a high school gym where patriotic bunting lined the bleachers, Obama presented himself as the one fighting for shared sacrifice and success against those who would gut government and let people fend for themselves. He did so knowing the nation is riven over the question of whether economic opportunity for all is evaporating.

“Throughout the country, it's sparked protests and political movements, from the tea party to the people who've been occupying the streets of New York and other cities,” Obama said.

“This is the defining issue of our time,” he said in echoing President Theodore Roosevelt's famous speech here in 1910.

“This is a make-or-break mo-



KEITH MYERS/KANSAS CITY STAR/MCT
President Barack Obama speaks at Osawatimie High School on Tuesday, December 6, 2011, in Osawatimie, Kansas.

ment for the middle class and all those who are fighting to get into the middle class,” Obama said. “At stake is whether this will be a country where working people can earn enough to raise a family, build a modest savings, own a home and secure their retirement.”

For Obama, saddled with a weak national economic recovery, the speech was a chance to break away from Washington's incremental battles and his own small-scale executive actions. He offered a sweeping indictment of

economic inequality and unleashed his own brand of prairie populism.

He spoke for nearly an hour to a supportive audience, reselling his ideas under the framework of “building a nation where we're all better off.”

Billed as an important address that would put today's economic debates in context, Obama's speech seemed a bit like two packaged into one.

The first was that of the campaigner, full of loft and reclamation of American values. The

second was the governing Obama, who recited his familiar jobs agenda, his feud with Congress over extending a Social Security tax cut, even his fight to get his consumer watchdog confirmed.

Obama tied himself to Roosevelt, the president and reformer who came to this town in eastern Kansas and called for a “square deal” for regular Americans. Roosevelt said then the fight for progress was a conflict “between the men who possess more than they have earned and the men who have earned more than they possess.”

It is a theme Obama is embracing in a mounting fight for re-election against Republicans who, regardless of the nominee, will attack his stewardship of the economy.

One of the leading contenders for the GOP nomination, Mitt Romney, ridiculed Obama for comparing himself to Roosevelt.

Obama “said that he is like Teddy Roosevelt,” Romney said at a campaign event in Paradise Valley, Ariz. “And I thought, ‘In what way is he like Teddy Roosevelt?’” Teddy Roosevelt of course founded the Bull Moose Party. One of those words applies.

Kirsten Kukowski, spokeswoman for the Republican National Committee, said, “Maybe instead of trying to be like other presidents, Obama should try being president.”

Obama took aim at the Republicans, saying they would only return the same structures that led to America's economic downturn. “Their philosophy is simple: We are better off when everyone is left to fend for themselves and play by their own rules,” Obama said. “I'm here to say they are wrong.”

Pearl Harbor Survivors Return To Ships After Death

BY AUDREY MCAVOY
Associated Press

HONOLULU — Lee Soucy decided five years ago that when he died he wanted to join his shipmates killed in the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Soucy lived to be 90, passing away just last year. On Tuesday, seven decades after dozens of fellow sailors were killed when the USS Utah sank on Dec. 7, 1941, a Navy diver will take a small urn containing his ashes and place it in a porthole of the ship.

The ceremony is one of five memorials being held this week for servicemen who lived through the assault and want their remains placed in Pearl Harbor out of pride and affinity for those they left behind.

“They want to return and be with the shipmates that they lost during the attack,” said Jim Taylor, a retired sailor who coordinates the ceremonies.

The memorials are happening the same week the country observes the 70th anniversary of the aerial bombing that killed 2,390 Americans and brought the United States into World War II. A larger ceremony to remember all those who perished will be held Wednesday just before 8 a.m. Hawaii time — the same moment the devastating attack began.

Most of the 12 ships that sank or were beached that day were removed from the harbor, their metal hulls salvaged for scrap. Just the Utah and the USS Arizona still lie in the dark blue waters. Only survivors of those vessels may return in death to their ships.

The cremated remains of Vernon Olsen, who served aboard the ship, will be interred on his ship during a sunset ceremony Wednesday. The ashes of three other survivors are being scattered in the harbor.

Soucy, the youngest of seven children, joined the Navy out of high school so he wouldn't burden his parents. In 1941, he was a pharmacist mate, trained to care for the sick and wounded.

He had just finished breakfast that Sunday morning when he saw planes dropping bombs on airplane hangars. He rushed to his battle station after feeling the Utah lurch, but soon heard the call to abandon ship as the vessel began sinking. He swam to shore, where he made a makeshift first aid center to help the wounded and dying. He worked straight through for two days.

The Utah lost nearly 60 men

on Dec. 7, and about 50 are still entombed in the battleship. Today, the rusting hull of the Utah sits on its side next to Ford Island, not far from where it sank 70 years ago.

Soucy's daughter, Margaret, said her parents had initially planned to have their ashes interred together at their church in Plainview, Texas. But her father changed his mind after visiting Pearl Harbor for the 65th anniversary in 2006.

“He announced that he wanted to be interred on the Utah. And my mother looked a little hurt and perplexed. And I said, ‘Don't worry Daddy, I'll take that part of your ashes that was your mouth and I'll have those interred on the Utah. And you can then tell those that have preceded you, including those that were entombed, what's been going on in the world,’” Margaret Soucy recalled saying with a laugh.

“And the rest of your remains we will put with mother in the church gardens at St. Mark's.” And then my sister spoke up and said, “Yes, then mother can finally rest in peace,” she said.

The family had longed kidded Soucy for being talkative — they called him “Mighty Mouth” — so Margaret Soucy said her father laughed and agreed. “He just thought that was hilarious,” she said.

“So that is what we are doing. We're taking only a portion of his ashes. It's going to be a small urn,” she said.

Soucy's three children, several grandchildren and great-grandchildren — 11 family members altogether — will be attending the sunset ceremony on Tuesday. His wife died earlier this year.

PROTESTING IN D.C.



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT
Thousands of unemployed men and women from around the country make the trek to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., Tuesday, December 6, 2011, to urge lawmakers to extend emergency federal unemployment insurance benefits.

Allies Urge Romney To Get Tough As Gingrich Rises

BY CHARLES BABINGTON
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Mitt Romney's above-the-fray campaign style kept him atop the Republican presidential field for months, but it's raising concerns among his supporters now that Newt Gingrich has surged to challenge him.

Some Romney backers say their candidate must mix it up more aggressively, with Gingrich and with reporters, to prove he has the moxie to be the GOP challenger to President Barack Obama. Romney, the former Massachusetts governor, particularly caused concern with his prickly responses in a recent Fox News interview. He needs to show more toughness and willingness to field questions, party insiders say.

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Bombing Kills 56 At Shiite Shrine In Kabul

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — In Afghanistan's first major sectarian assault since the fall of the Taliban regime a decade ago, a suicide bomber slaughtered 56 Shiite worshippers and wounded more than 160 others Tuesday outside a Shiite shrine in the capital.

The body of a woman, clutching a dead child in each arm, was sprawled along a dirt road littered with shoes, bloodstained clothing, hats and body parts after the blast, which took place as a bombing killed four Shiites in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

A loudspeaker at the shrine blasted a recitation of the Quran as ambulances with loud sirens rushed in to carry away the dead and wounded. Outside a hospital in Kabul, a man sobbing with other relatives cried out “Mother! My mother!”

The Taliban condemned the attack, which was reminiscent of the wave of sectarian bloodshed that shook Iraq during the height of the war there. Suspicion centered on militant groups based in neighboring Pakistan where Sunni attacks on minority Shiites are common.

A man who claimed to be from Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a Pakistan-based group that has carried out attacks against Shiite Muslims, called various media outlets in Pakistan to claim responsibility for the bombing in Kabul. The validity of the claim could not be determined.

Blagojevich Attorney: Sentence Is Too Harsh

CHICAGO (AP) — Rod Blagojevich's attorneys admitted Tuesday for the first time that the former Illinois governor is guilty of corruption, saying at his sentencing hearing that he accepts the verdicts against him but the prison term requested by prosecutors is too harsh.

Those comments are in stark contrast to Blagojevich's public statements, in which he adamantly maintained his innocence through two trials since his arrest three years ago.

Attorney Sheldon Sorosky told Judge James Zagel that it was illegal for Blagojevich to ask for a job for himself in exchange for his naming of a replacement for President Obama in the U.S. Senate. “There's no doubt this is a crime to do this in relation to the Senate seat, we accept that,” Sorosky said. “I am just saying that does not call for a 15 to 20 year jail” term.

Sorosky made the same argument when he talked about the other crimes for which the former governor was convicted — shaking down a racetrack executive and a hospital executive, as well as lying to the FBI.

U.S. Will Use Foreign Aid To Defend Gay Rights

GENEVA (AP) — The Obama administration bluntly warned the world against gay and lesbian discrimination Tuesday, declaring the U.S. will use foreign assistance as well as diplomacy to back its insistence that gay rights are fully equal to other basic human rights.

In unusually strong language, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton compared the struggle for gay equality to difficult passages toward women's rights and racial equality, and she said a country's cultural or religious traditions are no excuse for discrimination.

“Gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights,” she said. “It should never be a crime to be gay.”

Clinton's audience included diplomats from Arab, African and other nations where homosexuality is criminalized or where brutality and discrimination against gay people is tolerated or encouraged.

Many of the ambassadors in the audience responded with stony faces and rushed out of the room as soon as Clinton finished speaking.

Study: Presidents Live Longer Than Their Peers

CHICAGO (AP) — White House wannabes take note: Contrary to the idea that being president speeds up aging, a study shows that many U.S. commanders in chief have actually lived longer than their peers.

Using life expectancy data for men the same age as presidents on their inauguration days, the study found that 23 of 34 presidents who died of natural causes lived several years longer than expected.

The four former presidents still alive have already lived longer than predicted, or likely will because they're in good health, the study said.

“The graying of hair and wrinkling of the skin seen in presidents while they're in office are normal elements of human aging,” said study author S. Jay Olshansky, a researcher on aging at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Stress can speed up those two outward signs of aging, and it's possible that job stress has made some presidents appear to age quickly. But the study shows that doesn't mean being doomed to an early grave.

Copy Of 13th Amendment Restored For Viewing

CHICAGO (AP) — Time had taken its toll on the nearly 147-year-old document, its surface creased and buckled, its inscriptions faded and an edge yellowed by old adhesive.

But the rare copy of the 13th Amendment that ended slavery, signed by President Lincoln and lawmakers who voted for it, still was beautiful to James Cornelius and Russ Maki when they pulled it from a vault at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

“I was overwhelmed to see it,” said Cornelius, the Springfield museum's curator, who longed to display the original document, instead of the facsimile visitors see now, during the museum's celebration of the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's presidency.

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