

Obama Embraces Economic Record

New Ad Hits Airwaves Ahead Of Second Debate

BY JULIE PACE
AND NEDRA PICKLER
Associated Press

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — With the economy showing some signs of improvement three weeks before Election Day, President Barack Obama on Monday laid down a full embrace of the economic record many Republicans say is his biggest weakness.

The president's first act in this critical campaign week was to announce a new battleground state advertisement featuring voters discussing the ways their economic conditions have improved during his term. The ad was hitting the airwaves as Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney huddled in intense preparation for their second debate as polls show a closely fought campaign.

"This race is tied," Obama said in an appeal to supporters asking them to donate at least \$5 to his re-election effort. He promised to be "fighting" for the election on the debate stage Tuesday night — something many of his supporters thought he did too little of in his first face-off with Romney.

Early voting is under way in dozens of states, giving the candidates little chance to recover from any slip-ups that come in these final days. Obama has been trying to get his supporters to lock in their choice now, and his campaign announced Monday that he and his wife, Michelle, would become the first president and first lady to cast their ballots early.

Obama planned to vote early



MICHAEL SEARS/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL/MCT
Vice presidential candidate Congressman Paul Ryan (R-Wisc.) campaigns at Carroll University in Waukesha, Wisconsin on Monday.

during a visit to his home state of Illinois next week, while Michelle Obama told a rally in Delaware, Ohio, that she dropped her absentee ballot in the mail Monday. "For me, it was Election Day," she said.

Even as polls show the race tightening nationally and in battleground states, Obama's campaign aides say they are encouraged by public and private surveys showing voters growing more confident about the direction of the economy. Those trends are behind the new 30-second spot the campaign is running in Colorado, Iowa, Nevada and Virginia.

"Stick with this guy," a gravelly voiced man says at the end of the commercial in a point Obama hopes wavering voters

will embrace. A second ad targeted at Ohio voters features former astronaut and Sen. John Glenn touting Obama's character and economic record.

Aides argue that some voters got a psychological boost when the unemployment rate fell below 8 percent last month for the first time since Obama's inauguration. But the campaign says it puts more stock in economic indicators showing an increase in consumer confidence and retail spending, which indicate shifts in voter behavior.

Retail sales rose 1.1 percent last month, the Commerce Department said Monday. That followed a 1.2 percent increase in August, which was revised slightly higher. Both were the

largest gains since October 2010.

Still, with millions of Americans still out of work, the campaign is trying to walk a fine line between touting economic gains and acknowledging that many voters are still struggling.

GOP vice presidential nominee Paul Ryan lambasted Obama's handling of the deficit during an appearance Monday in Ryan's home state of Wisconsin. He pointed to a digital scoreboard his campaign set up at the far end of Carroll University's field house that tracked the growth of the nation's deficit in real time.

"Look at how fast those numbers are running," Ryan said. "We know without a shred of doubt that we have consigned the next generation to this path of debt."

White House Mulls How To Strike Over Libya Attack

BY KIMBERLY DOZIER
AND RUKMINI CALLIMACHI
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House has put special operations strike forces on standby and moved drones into the skies above Africa, ready to strike militant targets from Libya to Mali — if investigators can find the al-Qaida-linked group responsible for the death of the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans in Libya.

But officials say the administration, with weeks until the presidential election, is weighing whether the short-term payoff of exacting retribution on al-Qaida is worth the risk that such strikes could elevate the group's profile in the region, alienate governments the U.S. needs to fight it in the future and do little to slow the growing terror threat in North Africa.

Details on the administration's position and on its search for a possible target were provided by three current and one former administration official, as

well as an analyst who was approached by the White House for help. All four spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the high-level debates publicly.

The dilemma shows the tension of the White House's need to demonstrate it is responding forcefully to al-Qaida, balanced against its long-term plans to develop relationships and trust with local governments and build a permanent U.S. counterterrorist network in the region.

Vice President Joe Biden pledged in his debate last week with Republican vice presidential nominee Paul Ryan to find those responsible for the Sept. 11 attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three others.

"We will find and bring to justice the men who did this," Biden said in response to a question about whether intelligence fail-

ures led to lax security around Stevens and the consulate. Referring back to the raid that killed Osama bin Laden last year, Biden said American counterterror policy should be, "if you do harm to America, we will track you to the gates of hell if need be."

"We will find and bring to justice the men who did this."

JOE BIDEN

Benghazi attack.

The attack has become an issue in the U.S. election season, with Republicans accusing the Obama administration of being slow to label the assault an act of terrorism early on, and slow to strike back at those responsible.

"They are aiming for a small pop, a flash in the pan, so as to be able to say, 'Hey, we're doing something about it,'" said retired Air Force Lt. Col. Rudy Attalah, the former Africa counterterrorism director for the Department of Defense under President George W. Bush.

Attalah noted that in 1998, after the embassy bombing in Nairobi, the Clinton administration fired cruise missiles to take out a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan that may have been producing chemical weapons for al-Qaida.

"It was a way to say, 'Look, we did something,'" he said.

A Washington-based analyst with extensive experience in Africa said that administration officials have approached him asking for help in connecting the dots to Mali, whose northern half fell to al-Qaida-linked rebels this spring. They wanted to know if he could suggest potential targets, which he says he was not able to do.

"The civilian side is looking into doing something, and is running into a lot of pushback from the military side," the analyst said. "The resistance that is coming from the military side is because the military has both worked in the region and trained in the region. So they are more realistic."

Gitmo Detainees Behave This Time At 9/11 Hearing

BY BEN FOX
Associated Press

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba — There were no rants this time, no ignoring the judge or getting out of their seats to pray — just one scornful remark from the professed mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks as a weeklong pretrial hearing began for five Guantanamo Bay detainees.

It was a sharply different atmosphere as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and his four co-defendants returned to court at the U.S. base in Cuba for the first time since their arraignment in May, when their concerted effort to disrupt the proceedings turned what was supposed to be a brief hearing into an unruly, 13-hour spectacle.

This time, the defendants sat quietly, cooperated with their attorneys and responded to the judge when asked. And they were awarded a small victory: The judge granted a defense request to allow the five men to skip the rest of this week's hearing if they choose, rather than risk being forced out of their cells and into the court by military guards.

Asked if he understood the implications of not attending court while hearings go on without him, Mohammed made his only statement of the day: "Yes, but I don't think there is any justice in this court."

The issue was only one of a handful to be resolved Monday in a weeklong hearing on about two dozen motions before the formal

trial, which is at least a year away. Most of the day was taken up by the debate over whether defendants must attend all proceedings under the rules of the special tribunals for wartime offenses known as military commissions.

Lawyers for two of the defendants said the threat to forcibly remove them from their cells and bring them to court is traumatic for men who were subjected to harsh interrogations that they say amounted to torture while in CIA custody, before going to Guantanamo in September 2006.

"Our clients may believe that ... I don't want to be subjected to this procedure that transports me here, brings up memories, brings up emotions of things that happened to me," said Jim Harrington, who represents Ramzi Binalshibh, accused of helping to provide support to the hijackers who crashed planes into the World Trade Center, Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania on Sept. 11, 2001.

Harrington's statement elicited groans from a small group of family members of Sept. 11 victims who were chosen by

lottery to come to Guantanamo to view the proceedings. A few other families watched the proceedings on closed-circuit TV from U.S. military bases.

Prosecutors wanted the men to be required to attend court sessions. The judge, Army Col. James Pohl finally ruled that Mohammed and his codefendants would not be forced to attend the hearings. He said he may require them to attend future pre-trial sessions and said they would have to be present for their trial.

Pizza Hut Rethinks Presidential Debate Stunt

NEW YORK (AP) — Pizza Hut is rethinking its contest daring people to ask "Sausage or Pepperoni?" at the presidential debate Tuesday.

After the stunt triggered backlash last week, the company says it's moving the promotion online, where a contestant will be randomly selected to win free pizza for life.

The pizza delivery chain had offered the prize — a pie a week for 30 years or a check for \$15,600 — to anyone who posed the question to either President Barack Obama or Republican candidate Mitt Romney during the live Town Hall-style debate.

But blogs and media outlets immediately took the pizza delivery chain to task for trying to capitalize on the election buzz by injecting itself into the process.

Pizza Hut spokesman Doug Terfehr said the majority of the feedback the company has seen has been very positive. He said that moving the contest online was a "natural progression of the campaign" after people got excited about the idea and "wished they could get in on it."

Historic Mosque In Syria's Aleppo Is Burned

BEIRUT (AP) — A landmark mosque in Aleppo was burned, scarred by bullets and trashed — the latest casualty of Syria's civil war — and President Bashar Assad on Monday ordered immediate repairs to try to stem Muslim outrage at the desecration of the 12th century site.

The Umayyad Mosque suffered extensive damage, as has the nearby medieval covered market, or souk, which was gutted by a fire that was sparked by fighting two weeks ago. The market and the mosque are centerpieces of Aleppo's walled Old City, which is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Government troops had been holed up in the mosque for months before rebels launched a push this week to drive them out. Activists and Syrian government officials blamed each other for the weekend fire at the mosque.

Rebel supporters also alleged that regime forces defaced the shrine with offensive graffiti and drank alcohol inside, charges bound to further raise religious tensions in Syria. Many of the rebels are Sunni Muslims, while the regime is dominated by Alawites, or followers of an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

"It's all blackened now," activist Mohammad al-Hassan said of the site, also known as the Great Mosque. One of Syria's oldest and largest shrines, it was built around a vast courtyard and enclosed in a compound adjacent to the ancient citadel.

More Drugs Linked To Outbreak Investigated

NEW YORK (AP) — Two more drugs from a specialty pharmacy linked to a meningitis outbreak are now being investigated, U.S. health officials said, as they urged doctors to contact patients who got any kind of injection from the company.

The New England Compounding Center of Framingham, Mass., has been under scrutiny since last month, when a rare fungal form of meningitis was linked to its steroid shots used mostly for back pain.

Monday's step by the Food and Drug Administration followed reports of three new infections. One is a report of a possible meningitis illness in a patient who got a spine injection of another type of steroid made by the company. The agency also learned of two heart transplant patients who got fungal infections after being given a third company product during surgery.

The illnesses are under investigation, and it's very possible the heart patients were infected by another source, FDA officials cautioned. They did not say whether the meningitis case involved a fungal infection or where three infections occurred.

As of Monday, the current outbreak has sickened 214 people, including 15 who have died, in 15 states. For weeks, officials have been urging doctors to contact patients who got shots of the company's steroid methylprednisolone acetate, advise them about the risks of fungal infection, and urge them to take any meningitis symptoms seriously.

Acquaintance: Suspect Upbeat After N.H. Killing

DOVER, N.H. (AP) — An actor and martial arts instructor accused of killing a female University of New Hampshire student last week was upbeat and described his life as "really good" three days after the woman's death, an acquaintance said Monday.

Seth Mazzaglia, of Dover, was charged Saturday with second-degree murder in the death of 19-year-old Elizabeth "Lizzi" Marriotti, who vanished a week ago and whose body has yet to be found. He is accused of strangling or suffocating her in his apartment Tuesday night; the search for the body has been focused on Peirce Island in nearby Portsmouth.

Mazzaglia, 29, didn't speak during a brief arraignment via video feed Monday, and his court-appointed attorneys didn't object to the prosecutor's request that he be held without bail.

But Craig Faulkner, who works at a theater company where Mazzaglia had auditioned, said he chatted with Mazzaglia for about 20 minutes on Friday while shopping at Best Buy in Newington. Mazzaglia, who was working in the store's video game section, told him: "Life is good," said Faulkner, producing artistic director at Seacoast Repertory Theatre in Portsmouth.

"I just asked him, 'How are things?' He said, 'Things are really good,'" Faulkner told The Associated Press.

Program Launched To Hire More Veterans

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some of the nation's leading manufacturing companies are launching a program to help veterans gain the skills necessary to fill some of the estimated 600,000 high-tech, manufacturing jobs that remain open because employers can't find qualified applicants.

The manufacturers say the program will be initially offered in 10 cities. The companies will work with local community and technology colleges to offer training and to put veterans on a fast track to obtaining certification in such areas as electronics, welding and machining.

The effort to hire more veterans will also involve working with employers to help them more effectively recruit veterans.

The unemployment rate for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan is about 2 percentage points higher than the national unemployment rate of 7.8 percent.

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