

Vital Signs

Election 2012



POSTER BY JOSEPH O'BRIEN -- EL DON NEWS

FORMER GOVERNOR MITT ROMNEY OR INCUMBENT PRESIDENT OBAMA: WHOM WILL WE CHOOSE?



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BY ELLEN CAHILL

Ronald Reagan famously questioned in the 1980 presidential campaign, “Are you better off now than you were four years ago?” This concern now looms over the 2012 election. Although this election differs from the former in that you can easily follow candidates Mitt Romney and Barack Obama on Twitter, the two contests are very similar. Due to the dissatisfaction with incumbent Jimmy Carter combined with the worsening economy and Iran hostage crisis, Reagan acquired an advantage and won in a landslide. Despite the fact that the answer to the question posed above varies greatly depending on one’s individual situation, there is a general mood of disfavor with current economic conditions. People want the change that was promised to them four years ago. We must ask if President Obama’s policies are actually taking our country down the road it ought to following. Since the answer to this question is “No!”, we must conclude that the change we need will only come if Governor Mitt Romney is elected President of the United States.

One of the most interesting aspects of this election is the fact that the party platforms differ to the core. They view the nation entirely differently. As the Republican platform stated, this election is “a referendum on the future of liberty in America.”

For the past few months, blogs everywhere

have concluded that the presidential race is over and Obama has already won. Yet, as Erik Erickson of *RedState* recently observed, Mitt Romney showed a clear and coherent message in the Denver debates: “too many people are out of work and we can do better now, not by waiting for Barack Obama to get his act together.” Romney’s message is finally resonating with the public and the delivery of this message is just as sound. It is not just Republicans who now believe that Romney can lead the country and understands how to fix the problems we are facing. The very important swing states are turning their attention toward Romney because they have realized the futility of President Obama’s plans. The bottom line is that Obama has not followed through on the promises he made in 2008.

First off, the economy is still far too weak. Obama has spent, as *Common Sense Republican* states, record amounts of tax dollars on his failing economic stimulus program to reach the highest national debt in history. The president has spent tax dollars “at a pace without precedent in recent history,” Mr. Romney said, and “added almost as much debt as all the prior presidents combined.” This statement is proven by the fact that the national debt has risen from \$10.6 trillion to \$15.8 trillion, an increase of almost fifty percent. Jobs are not being created at the pace we had expected. Of utmost importance, there is an uncertainty that is affecting the economy. The fact that people do not trust the economy acts as an impediment towards investing. Businesses are thus not expanding and creating jobs because of this economic uncertainty.

A major reason for anxiety is that we as a country stand on the edge of an economic cliff. The Bush tax cuts expire soon and by law will revert to former rates. This will affect the rich

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On the Cover:
Mitt Romney and President Obama “duke it out” in a close contest -- poster by Joseph O’Brien, *el Don News*.

more than anyone else. Why would we allow this to happen when it is the rich who are in the best position to help the economy by building businesses? Two years ago, Obama also cut Social Security tax rates for employees. Yet the rates will return to former levels in January and will make a huge impact for many of those in the workforce. In regard to these impending threats 16 CEOs who are members of the financial industry trade group have warned that “the consequences of inaction -- for stability in global financial markets, for economic growth, for millions of Americans still without work, and for the financial circumstances of American businesses and households -- would be very grave.”

In contrast to the President, Romney has been described as pro-business, as he has actually worked in and created jobs in the private sector. Plus, he has effectively governed Massachusetts. A pro-business outlook is the spark we need right now, since the economy is fundamentally driven by private sector investment; Romney is more empowered to provide this attitudinal change. To preserve the American dream, hard work needs to be rewarded so that those in positions to create jobs for others trust the economy and have incentives to invest. Maintaining the current tax cuts and even expanding them, as Governor Romney has proposed, will serve this goal.

Health care is a very important issue in this election. It seems as though the overwhelming question is as follows: can the government mandate how individual health care is

handled? The federal government has recently imposed insurance regulations that violate the Constitution, for example, by telling Catholic hospitals, religiously based enterprises, that they must carry contraceptive coverage for their employees. If the government can do this, where does its power end? Also, under the President’s Affordable Care Act – popularly known as Obamacare -- Medicare will raise the premiums to be paid by higher-income beneficiaries. If Mitt Romney were elected, he would attempt to repeal Obamacare. Unfortunately, this would be very difficult because many of the steps of this plan are kicking in separately. It will be hard to turn this system around, but Romney would revert much of the authority to the state level where it belongs.

It is clear that America is no longer the dominant world power it once was. We have lost respect from many of the countries that once looked up to us. The Iranian situation is volatile, and Obama’s economic sanctions policy is not working. The United States ambassador to Libya was recently murdered in a terrorist attack and the Obama administration has done everything it could to deceive the public about what actually went on. Israel is a stabilizing force in the Middle East, but it needs our support to play this role effectively. Romney will prove to be more supportive of Israel and more decisive about foreign policy toward China as well by getting tougher on its trade violations.

As shown in October’s polls of likely voters, there has been a surge in support for

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Mitt Romney and running mate Paul Ryan campaign in Norfolk, VA.

“People want the change that was promised to them four years ago.”

Romney, making it a tight race. As Tom Cohen of CNN wrote, the latest polls show Romney catching up to or passing President Obama in the overall race and in some of the swing states still considered vital to the outcome of the election. Some of those polls also show a hike in Romney’s favorability rating, indicating more respondents were supporting the former Massachusetts governor instead of simply opposing Obama.

Though the race is yet to be won, it is clear that the deciding factor for many voters will be whether they feel President Obama has managed the economy well and delivered on his promises. There are too many reasons to be dissatisfied with Obama’s policies to allow them to continue. Therefore, Mitt Romney must match his platform in the closing days of the campaign to what Ronald Reagan offered in 1980, by insisting that the current state of economic, military and diplomatic conditions in this country must be changed. If Mitt Romney continues to articulate this critique along with his own plans for America, there is no doubt in my mind that he can win the presidency.

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Obama 2012: Moving Forward

BY TANAY GUPTA

For more than seventy years, America has gone to war on foreign soil undertaking the modern version of the “White Man’s Burden,” in other words going out of our way to make sure that other, “less developed” nations are safe from terrorism and international aggression. We fought on the Korean Peninsula and in Vietnam, on the shores of the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, and we are now finally nearing a deadline to remove our troops from Afghanistan. President Barack Obama argues that America has been fighting other people’s wars for too long and that we need to firmly pull out all troops by 2014. By contrast, Governor Mitt Romney has stressed the need to “reassess” the situation in Afghanistan to ensure that the job is completely finished. In the meantime we might have to keep troops there indefinitely, even though the great majority of Americans wants them to come home. This contrast is indicative of the reasons why the re-election of the President is the best course for the country. In addition to promoting a more consistent foreign policy that reflects the values of ordinary Americans, President Obama has shown himself to be a likeable character, with solid stances on issues such as reducing the national debt, controlling military spending and creating jobs that will truly improve the lives of the majority of Americans.

The environment in which Barack Obama grew up definitely influences his distinct democratic beliefs. While Mitt Romney was spending vacations at his family’s multi-million dollar summer house, Obama was living a simple adolescence where he travelled on Greyhound buses and rarely rented a car. Though his family did not have much means, he graduated from Columbia University and became a community organizer in Chicago. It was there that he was forced to “deal with urban poverty” and “[come] to terms with his place in Black America” according to the *New York Times*. Many of his policies as president can be traced back to his childhood experience of watching people struggle to live basic everyday lives.

Taxes have been eagerly debated this election cycle, as government revenues continue to fall short of present expenditures, increasing our already massive national debt. While



CECILIORICARDO, WIKIMEDIACOMMONS

On January 20, 2009, with his family by his side, Barack Obama is sworn in as the 44th president of the United States by Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr. in Washington, D.C.

Romney likes to boast about cutting taxes, he fails to take into account the pressing importance of tax revenues in lowering the national debt. His famous five trillion dollar tax cut would not be not useful, because it will make it harder to reduce our huge borrowing from foreign lenders. As Warren Buffett indicated when he wondered why he was paying a lower tax rate than his secretary, people who are well off should be paying more to the government than the average individual. Joe Biden confirmed this view in the Vice Presidential debate, noting that if the President is reelected, “the middle class will pay less [taxes], and people making a million dollars or more will begin to contribute slightly more.” It is not only a necessary but also a logical decision. To argue that the rich account for a large portion of American jobs and that these slight tax increases will hinder such ability is ludicrous. It is a mere excuse for Republicans to try to keep their wealth. Romney is pursuing a top-down approach that never works, because the country succeeds when “the middle class is doing well,” as Obama recognizes.

Truthfulness should be central to a presidential campaign, and that was certainly

lacking in Romney’s remarks in the October 3rd debate regarding his five trillion dollar tax cut. It was frustrating for viewers to hear Obama say with conviction that it is impossible to cut taxes and not raise the debt, while the governor asserted the opposite in an equally unflagging manner. As *Businessweek* explained recently, it is just rhetoric for Romney to say that he will “simultaneously cut taxes on upper-income households, keep middle-income tax burdens from rising, and prevent an increase in the budget deficit,” because the numbers just don’t add up. However, in trying to please the rich and still get into office, he needs to keep the middle class content, which is a difficult balancing act to say the least. Misleading economic arguments have been the result.

As the bipartisan Congressional Budget Office has noted, the United States actually had hundred billion dollar budget surpluses under the Clinton Administration during the late 1990s. Following him, however, the two wars that the country was plunged into by President Bush put roughly four trillion dollars on the tab that President Obama had to pick up when he came into office. It is

“The Democratic agenda -- to have the wealthy pay their fair share, to bring the troops back home from Afghanistan by 2014, and to continue using President Obama’s approach to assuage the jobs crisis -- provides the best plan for American progress over the next four years. “

this astonishing cost and the 300,000 civilian and soldier deaths “in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan as a result of the fighting at the hands of all parties to the conflict,” according to the *Costs of War* report, that have brought Obama to force an end to our combat role in the Middle East. Three-quarters of the public want the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan to end in 2014.

The president has shown boldness and decisiveness in getting other tough jobs done in foreign policy. On his order, the U.S. Navy SEALs launched an ambitious raid on Osama Bin Laden’s compound in Pakistan. It was his resolute call to go ahead and kill the most notorious terrorist in the world—the one who brought us into the region in the first place. The president is a realist in his foreign policy and understands that the primary military objectives are now complete in the Middle East. There is no reason to keep our forces on the ground there any longer.

Jobs are the most important issue for Americans and an improvement in that sector is critical for the future. Obama has had four years to “fix” the jobs crisis, but many people are still unsatisfied. However, according to a Bureau of Labor Statistics report, the unemployment rate dropped to 7.8% in September 2012 with a substantial gain of 873,000 jobs. This is the largest increase in jobs numbers since 1983. Contrary to popular belief fueled by Republican rhetoric, the economy cannot miraculously improve overnight, and reducing the unemployment rate is a long-term project. Because of the severe blow the economy has suffered since 2008, we, the general public, have to be patient in waiting for the recovery. So, to criticize the President for not “fixing” the problem entirely is unfair, especially since he did indeed prevent it from dropping

any further. As shown in a *Forbes* report by the Chief US Technology officer Todd Park, President Obama’s leadership has made a huge impact in “promoting high-growth entrepreneurship, helping accelerate technology breakthroughs, and investing in the ‘building blocks’ of innovation.” A two page analysis on the *Forbes* site lists the numerous steps Obama took to rectify the jobs crisis, and yet, Republicans disparage the President as though he has been asleep during his presidency. He has tried to promote growth in small business and to give the middle class more desperately needed cash to slowly revive the American Economy.

The President has experience in the Oval Office, he knows his duties and has been diligently working for the American people. During the October 11th Vice Presidential debate, Governor Romney’s running mate Paul Ryan slated Obama’s inability to take counsel from the Republicans and effectively communicate with them. Yet Vice President Biden, calling Ryan’s bluff, immediately retorted that the President had been doing precisely that. New candidates running for the office do not understand the difficulties imposed by the opposite party in getting bills passed. Often, when it seems like the President may not have done anything to fix a certain problem, it was actually just that the Congress had reached a stalemate that prevented his bill from being passed. As the *New York Times* notes, Ryan then went onto say that his Medicare reform plan was drafted with a Democrat. He failed to note that the Democrat dropped support for the plan after Ryan “reduced the rate at which the federal subsidies would grow.” The Romney-Ryan ticket is not dependable, but rather an unreliable team that would be far weaker than the experienced Obama-Biden ticket.

The Democratic agenda -- to have the wealthy pay their fair share, to bring the troops back home from Afghanistan by 2014, and to continue using President Obama’s approach to assuage the jobs crisis-- provides the best plan for American progress over the next four years. During the Governors’ panel at Pingry, former Governor Kean, clearly referring to Mitt Romney’s record of flip-flopping, questioned the importance of staying consistent with earlier public statements; however, the voters’ sense that they can trust a candidate’s promises is a critical factor in guiding their vote. The Republican Party has put on a veneer of claiming to lower taxes on the middle class without having any real intentions of doing so. By contrast, President Obama has accomplished major milestones such as the killing of Osama Bin Laden, and is waiting for a second term to solidify his plans and see real growth in the nation. Governor Romney may seem to be a kind-hearted, intelligent man, but it is really President Obama who is fit to govern America and work hard for the greater good during his second term.

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CHARLOTTEZEE (V)



The Impact of the Presidential Debates

BY RACHEL DAVIS

On October 4, 2012, the first of three presidential debates between President Barack Obama, the Democratic nominee, and former Governor of Massachusetts Mitt Romney, the Republican nominee, was held at the University of Denver. This first debate was possibly the most important because it got the ball rolling and highlighted what each of the candidates had to say to convince undecided voters that they were the right pick. Although polls show that by the time the presidential debates occur most Americans have already made up their minds about whom they are supporting, the debates can have a significant impact on a close election because they occur at a critical time—the first debate took place a mere 34 days before the presidential election. As Reuters News reported, before the first debate, “Obama had led Romney by 6 percentage points in the poll released on Wednesday [October 3] and the edge [had] narrowed down to 5 points in polling up to Thursday.” Now the polls show an even closer margin, with the candidates seemingly tied and the election too close to call. What happened that made the President’s edge shrink? How did Romney close the gap? Although all of the debates made an

impact on voter polls, it is clear that the first was most significant. The first debate was a critical point during the campaign because it affected the tone of the next two debates and determined how Obama and Romney had to act in order to make up for their previous mistakes.

During the first debate, the main reason why Romney was able to close the gap in the polls was not mainly because of what the candidates said, but because President Obama appeared to lack aggression and enthusiasm. On closer inspection of the debate transcript, Obama’s arguments seemed clearer and more effective than those of Mitt Romney. Unfortunately for the President, most voters simply base their opinion on what they see on television. During the debate, the president seemed like he did not want to be there. This could have been because it was the Obamas’ anniversary, and some speculate that the President held the debate on that date to show people that he puts his country first before himself and his personal family matters. The president himself stated that there was “some speculation as to whether this had an impact on [his] performance.” Personal conditions aside, it is widely believed that the President’s performance was indeed flat. To me, this was a major fault in his campaign

because he had to compensate for his lackluster performance in the next two debates. If the president had come out stronger during the first debate, then perhaps the results now would be more in his favor.

The first debate was centered on domestic issues with a focus on the economy. When asked what the major differences between their respective job creation plans were, both candidates agreed that a major factor in reducing unemployment should be the education sector. Both of the candidates’ arguments about how to create jobs boiled down to small business. Romney wants to bring down tax rates for small businesses to enable them to hire more people. Obama replied that Romney’s tax cut policies include millionaires and billionaires as small businesses. He explained, “this approach will not grow our economy because the only way to pay for it without either burdening the middle class or blowing up our deficit is to make drastic cuts in things like education.”

President Obama claimed that Romney’s economic plan is centered on a “five trillion dollar tax cut”, a claim that Mitt Romney has denied vigorously. Obama’s campaign aides have said that the president was taken aback during the debate by Romney’s willingness to abandon his previous positions, including key aspects of his tax cut proposal. Romney asserted that he “will cut the tax rates by twenty percent and eliminate the estate tax and alternative minimum tax.” Romney further claimed that he will be able to make it work by doing away with tax loopholes and deductions, but he has not provided details. However, according to the *Washington Post*, Romney’s numbers simply don’t add up. While Romney rebutted by referencing six other studies, the works that “support” Romney’s position did not actually provide him any real proof. This was precisely Obama’s point in saying, “math, common sense, and our history show us that’s not a recipe for job growth.” Nonetheless, fact checking after the debate revealed that each candidate had tried to manipulate numbers in his own favor.

The second question the moderator Jim Lehrer asked also related to the economy: “What are the differences between you two about how you would go about tackling the deficit problem in this country?” Romney

Presidential Candidates Mitt Romney and Barack Obama wave to the crowd in Denver during the first of three debates.

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ALLISON YU (V)

said, “the President would prefer to raise taxes, but the problem with raising taxes is that it slows down the rate of growth.” Romney’s plan is to cut everything that involves borrowing money from China, and on his list is “Obamacare” and PBS. He also wants to have more programs run at the state level. Thirdly, he believes that he can make the government more efficient by cutting back the number of employees and combining some agencies and departments. However, the main part of Romney’s deficit reduction plan that registered with voters is the fact that he is going to cut out PBS, and most notoriously, Big-Bird. Various social media sites flooded with pictures, tweets and statuses about Romney’s grave threat to Big-Bird’s existence. To many people, this was the only light and funny moment in the entire debate, and Big-Bird subsequently made an appearance on Saturday Night Live. The fact that this was the only moment that could be turned into a comedic skit shows how serious and intense both candidates were during the debate and how effective the debate was.

The second debate, formatted as a town hall meeting, was substantially different from the other two debates because audience members asked the questions. The format, which allows the candidates free movement on the stage, affected the way they reacted to one another; there were moments when Romney and Obama were very much “in each other’s faces.” Before the debate, commentators stated that this format would benefit the President more because he is better at connecting with an audience. It was obvious that the President became much more aggressive and heated during the second debate compared to the first. One of the most memorable points during the debate was when discussing women’s issues, Romney said that he “had received binders full of women to consider for cabinet positions when he was governor of Massachusetts.” This gave the impression that Romney had to “search” high and low for qualified women, as if they were

hiding under a rock.

During the third debate about foreign policy, both candidates seemed to agree on the major points of foreign policy, diverging onto topics about education and the economy. One of the major topics discussed, and possibly prominent in many voters’ minds, was Israel and what each of the candidates would do if Israel were attacked by Iran. Both candidates agreed that if Israel was attacked, they would support it because Israel is an important ally. On the topic of foreign policy, it became noticeable that both of the candidates had similar views, which perhaps explains why they wanted to move on to domestic issues. During the last debate, both candidates were energetic and commanding, indicating no clear winner, though most commentators gave an edge to the President, similar to the outcome of the second debate.

Another important factor of each of the three debates were the moderators. The first moderator, Jim Lehrer, has been criticized. Jim Lehrer had already done twelve presidential debates, which is perhaps why he appeared to lack energy, enthusiasm, and control. It is arguable, however, that his passive style was due to the fact that the debate rules were changed to allow the candidates more time to speak. Some people actually praised him because the candidates were able to truly debate and not just discuss the topics they had time for. The second debate’s moderator, Candy Crowley, was heavily criticized for correcting Romney. When Romney said that the President did not immediately call the murder of the US ambassador to Libya an act of terror, she supported the president by saying that “he did call it an act of terror,” thus fact-checking Romney. When she pointed this out, the overwhelming response was that she had overstepped her duties as moderator by correcting Romney. However, CNN defended Crowley by saying that the mediator “was merely stating a point of fact.” As previously stated, most undecided voters make their decision on what they see on television, and if they see that the moderator had to correct Romney, then some might believe that Romney is also wrong about other issues. This was a major hit to Romney and affected the results of the second debate, where the president was “said to win.” During the third debate, moderator Bob Schieffer allowed the candidates to diverge from the topic of foreign policy. However, he asked the questions that I believe everyone wanted to know the answers to. All in all, Lehrer was the most passive; Crowley the most involved; and Schieffer was somewhere in the middle.

For members of the media as well as the general public, commanding presence was a major factor in determining the victor of the debates. During the first debate, Romney’s multiple interruptions of the president might appear as negative, but it proved effective because it allowed Romney to exude an air of confidence. For example, Romney demonstrated his aggressiveness by directly asking Obama a question and looking at him when responding to his answers. Unlike Obama, Romney looked at his adversary when he was asked to respond to him. He was much more energetic and lively—he used hand motions to convey his points, his voice was stronger, and his overall appearance seemed youthful. Obama looked, as the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel put it, “tired, slow on the uptake, and unprepared,” while Romney looked like he was trying to emulate Ronald Reagan, although whether or not he can actually deliver like Reagan is subject to question. However, during the second and third debate, the President seemed revitalized. His performances during both debates were energetic and powerful. Similarly, Romney was as aggressive and passionate as before.

A similar theme in all three debates is the fact that style overpowers substance. If one of the candidates appears stronger and more energetic, than more people will believe that the first candidate is in fact the better debater, even if the content is not more convincing. The presentation became possibly the most important factor in these debates. The President did not present himself in an attractive manner in the first debate, and as previously noted, not many people are going to read the actual transcript. This issue of style over substance has become a prominent problem during these debates.

A poll was released on Monday October 8th by the Pew Research Center that showed that Romney’s strong performance in the first debate had helped him pull ahead. According to Pew, “likely voters favored Romney in the presidential race by forty-nine percent to Obama’s forty-five percent, while Romney came up even at forty-six percent with Obama among registered voters.” This swift and immediate reaction to the debate was both biting criticism and a stark warning to the President. If President Obama did not improve his performance, his failure in the first debate could ultimately cost him the election. However, once all three debates had ended, polls of likely voters did not show a clear overall winner. According to CNN’s Gallup poll, 46% say that Romney did a better job, compared to 44% for Obama over all three

of the debates. However, this 2% margin is within the sampling error. Though there was no cumulative “debate winner” in public opinion surveys, before the first debate Obama had had a clear lead in the election polls. However, even as Obama’s performances improved in the second and third debates, he had not regained his lead in the polls. Perhaps the damage had already been done during the first debate and Obama could not make up for his loss even with his later strong performances. If Romney had been as

powerful in the last two debates as he was in the first, perhaps he would be leading in both popular and electoral vote.

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A Business Leader Assesses the Obama Record and the 2012 Election

BY MELANIE NARATIL

Robert Wolf is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of 32 Advisers, LLC, a consulting and advisory firm. In addition, he hosts “Impact Players” on the Reuters Channel. He is a member of President Obama’s Council on Jobs and Competitiveness, and previously served on the President’s Economic Recovery Advisory Board from 2009-2011. In addition, Mr. Wolf serves on the Athletics Board of Overseers at the University of Pennsylvania, the Undergraduate Executive Board of the Wharton School, and the boards of several non-profit institutions. He previously worked at Salomon Brothers and was the Group Regional CEO and Chairman for UBS in the Americas.

Q: As a member of the President’s Job Council, how do you respond to Republican criticisms of the administration’s record on unemployment?

A: I believe that the country is on the right trajectory for an ever improving recovery. The US has had 31 straight months of private sector job gains with over five million job gains including the best revival in the manufacturing sector since the 1990s. The average hour workweek is now at pre-recession levels and the unemployment number is the lowest since January 2009. Lastly, you cannot discount the comeback in the stock markets with gains of over 100% since the lows and a 5 year high.

Q: As a former senior Wall Street executive, do you ever feel uncomfortable with the administration’s criticism of the financial services industry?

A: As an executive who was at the Federal Reserve during the Lehman failure, I am a supporter of the need for new regulations in the financial service industry and support many of the key elements to Dodd Frank [a Wall Street reform bill signed in by Obama in 2010] such as systemic regulation, resolution authority, derivative transparency to name a few. I am not someone who worries about campaign rhetoric and have always believed that our industry needs to exude humility and keep our ethical behavior beyond reproach.

Q: As the CEO of a newly formed small business, [i.e. 32

Advisers] do you see any positives in the economic policy proposals of Mitt Romney?

A: I am not too familiar with Governor Romney’s proposal other than reducing taxes; and, although everyone would like lower taxes, it does not seem realistic to me that we will be able to reduce our deficit without the need for increased revenues as well as a reduction in defense spending and entitlement reform. The one thing that I know is that whenever our country is in war, taxes follow and we have been in 2 wars for the past 10 years, so I am realistic that it we will eventually have to pay for them.

Q: You are a significant fundraiser for both President Obama and the Democratic Party. I very rarely see positive advertisements or web videos by either candidate. Should donors be more forceful about their expectations for a more civil tone in political advertising?

A: I am all for a drastic overhaul of campaign reform and am



not a supporter of the *Citizens United* decision. I think this negative advertising does not lead to bipartisanship and this is key for our country. I have not been involved in fundraising nor contributing to a super-PAC.

Q: What can be done in Washington to promote a more bipartisan solution to our most critical challenges as a nation? I feel that my generation is getting stuck with the cost of your generation's inability to deal with the hard problems they created like the federal deficit.

A: I am hopeful that overwhelming voice of the nation will force Washington DC to get a deal done on the fiscal deficit, on immigra-

tion reform, a focus on an “all of the above” energy approach and the need to invest in education & infrastructure.

Q: What is one method that could most help our economy move faster?

A: Investment in infrastructure where every \$1 dollar spent has a 1.6 multiplier impact on our GDP and 25,000+ jobs for every \$1 billion spent. Also, there are large amounts of private capital to team up with the government on public-private partnerships in infrastructure projects. Lastly, engineers feel that 1 trillion dollars is needed and currently give us a D rating and our country is too good to be anything but “best practices” when it comes to our infrastructure.

Former Senator Phil Gramm on the 2012 Election

BY MELANIE NARATIL

I recently had the opportunity to catch up with Senator Phil Gramm and get his thoughts on some issues surrounding the upcoming presidential election. His combined experience in American government and Wall Street gives him valuable insight into the political and economic factors that are currently influencing our country. Senator Phil Gramm is the senior partner at US Policy Metrics, an economic and public policy research firm serving asset managers, hedge funds, and investors. Prior to that, he spent nine years as the Vice-Chairman of UBS Investment Bank, providing strategic economic, political, and policy advice to major corporate and institutional clients.

Earlier in his career, Senator Gramm spent six years in the US House of Representatives, followed by eighteen years in the US Senate. Serving first as a Democratic Congressman, he was the only member of Congress in the twentieth century to resign and seek re-election as a member of another political party. He spent the rest of his political career as a Republican Congressman and Senator. His legislative efforts produced the Gramm-Latta Budget, which cut back federal spending, rebuilt national defense, and mandated the Reagan tax cuts, as well as the Gramm-Rudman Act, which established the first binding constraints on federal spending. He was effective at modernizing banking, insurance, and securities law as evidenced by the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, which allowed banks, securities firms, and insurance companies to affiliate as part of a financial services holding company. In addition to holding a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Georgia, he taught the subject at Texas A&M University for twelve years and has published articles and books related to economics.

My exchange with Senator Gramm went as follows:

Mel: As a former Democrat yourself, what must Mitt Romney do to attract votes from Independents and disaffected Democrats?

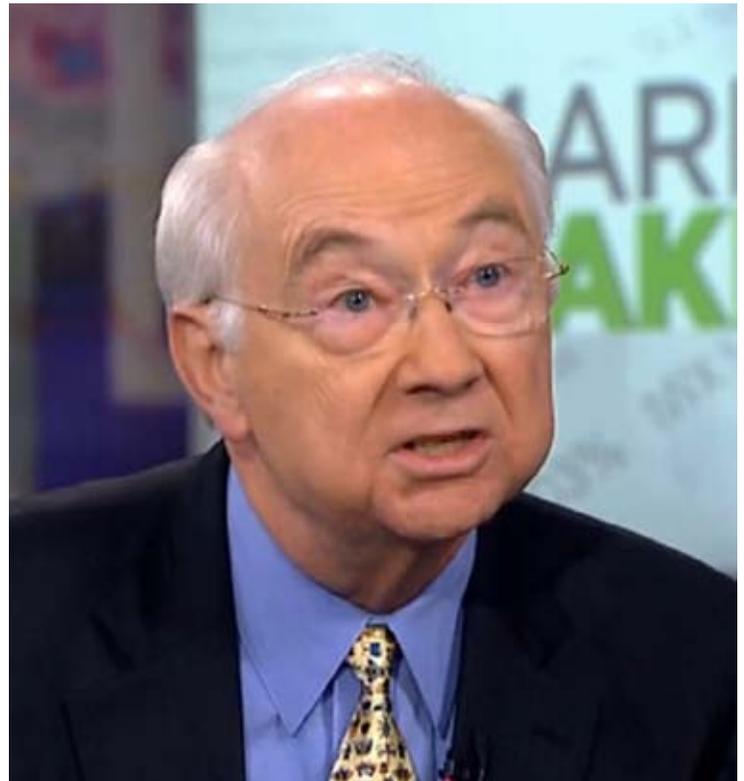
Senator Gramm: The dominant issue in the 2012 campaign is jobs. The Obama program has produced the most anemic recovery in the post war history of the country. To win the vote of moderate Democrats and Independents Romney has to convince them that he has a credible plan to get America growing again.

Mel: What states will be the key ones to watch on Election night?

Senator Gramm: I believe that Romney will carry Florida, North Carolina, Virginia and Indiana, all states that Obama carried 4 years ago. The key state to watch on election night is Ohio. If Romney carries Ohio, he has won the election. He can also win the election by carrying Wisconsin and two other states. Finally, he could win the election by carrying Nevada, Colorado, Iowa and New Hampshire. If Romney carries Pennsylvania, then he is going to win by a big margin.

Mel: Some have compared President Obama's re-election

Senator Phil Gramm in a recent TV interview



USPOLICYMETRICS

to that of Jimmy Carter's in 1980. What is your view and what could Obama do to avoid Carter's fate?

Senator Gramm: No President in the post war history of America has ever been re-elected with an unemployment rate anywhere near 7.8%, the current level of unemployment. No President has been re-elected in post World War II America with a growth rate anywhere near 1.2%, the current economic growth rate. In the end Americans have historically voted their pocketbooks and these two indicators of private sector performance have been strong predictors of voter behavior. Perhaps if Obama had admitted that his program did not work and proposed a dramatic change in policy he could have overcome the poor economic performance of the last four years, but he did exactly the opposite in making it clear he would not change his policies if he is re-elected.

Mel: There are some in Congress calling for a return to the Glass-Steagall restrictions on banks and investment banks. As the lead sponsor of Gramm-Leach-Bliley, are you still happy with your legislation?

Senator Gramm: I don't get any royalties on Gramm-Leach-Bliley

and if I thought the law had been harmful to the economy, I would have said so and called for its repeal. I don't see any evidence whatsoever that allowing banks to affiliate with security companies and insurance companies through a financial services holding company had anything to do with the financial crisis, and certainly no one has presented any evidence to the contrary. It's also instructive to note that President Obama did not change Gramm-Leach-Bliley when he re-wrote the financial laws of the country.

Mel: You have a record as a strong fiscal conservative. If you were the Senate Majority Leader after the election, (as a Republican), what would you do to address the debt crisis my generation faces?

Senator Gramm: I would cut spending through a consistent program that reduces discretionary spending and that reforms Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. We must make our choice between government profligacy and private sector prosperity, between government granted security and opportunity. You can't have unlimited government and unlimited opportunity. I choose opportunity. We will see what America chooses on November 6th.

Campaign Spending: Through the Roof

BY GAURAV GUPTA

The world of politics is not for the average individual. One cannot simply wake up one morning and decide to run for President of the United States. The most important factor in deciding who can run for office may be whether or not he or she can fund a campaign. According to the *New York Times*, as of July of 2012, President Barack Obama had amassed more than \$1.3 billion for his reelection. His Republican counterpart, Mitt Romney, had accumulated more than \$1.1 billion for his campaign efforts. Yet much, if not most of the money spent on presidential campaigns is wasted and can be put to more effective uses.

Amidst the arguing with and belittling of their respective adversaries, one thing is clear about each of this year's candidates: campaign funding is through the roof. While America has always had a reputation of funding puffed up political campaigns, this past decade has proven to be something entirely different. As reported by *Wordpress*, the campaign funds spent since 2000 have amounted to over \$2 billion more than what was spent from 1860 to 2000 combined. This leaves many people asking themselves, why do candidates spend so much money?

As more and more citizens have become anxious about rough economic times, presidential candidates try to capitalize. Going into the 2012 election, political observers have identified nine undecided states. Surprisingly, although nine states does not seem like much, what happens in them on November 6th will probably mean the difference between having a Democrat or a Republican in the White House. Therefore, candidates need to convince undecided voters in these critical swing states to vote for them; one way to do so is through massive campaign spending. Experience indicates that having a message repeated constantly helps it to stick. Bombarding citizens with the same campaign messages and promises would likely help to influence their decisions come Election Day. Therefore, candidates post advertisements everywhere possible: on radio, television, Internet, billboards, and even via telemarketing. This fall, the number of people receiving repeated phone calls from campaign organizations asking for support and donations has been staggering. Whether or not one lives in an



TRACEY LIN (V)

undecided, or swing state, candidates will target every voter possible in a drastic attempt for last minute support.

Candidates are also doing whatever possible to dissuade voters from voting for the opponent. Not a day goes by without stories about negative campaign ads on the news. The negative attacks between President Obama and former Governor Romney resemble fights between little children. Instead of focusing ad dollars on promoting his

own cause, each candidate feels the need to slander his opponent, a tactic that has almost become a campaign tradition. For example, by early October Mitt Romney had spent approximately \$125 million on negative campaign ads against President Obama. This was a staggering 23% of Romney's entire campaign spending devoted to attempts to defame Obama. That Romney believed he had to spend a quarter of all his campaign funds on negative campaign ads only makes people uncertain and suspicious about Romney's true agenda if elected president. "Outside groups" affiliated with the campaigns devote an even higher percentage of their spending toward attack advertising. The *Washington Post* reported recently that two weeks before the election, the total number of campaign ads broadcast – most of them negative -- had already far exceeded the number run in 2008. For this reason, among others, people feel that campaign spending should be limited.

Governmental policies can help to cut down on campaign contributions and spending. In 1907, the US government took measures to limit campaign revenues and spending by preventing corporations from donating to federal candidates. Corporations are the richest entities in America; therefore giving them the power to donate large sums of money to candidates could pressure officials to adopt policies beneficial to that specific corporation. This ban on corporate contributions to candidates was only one of several laws put into place to regulate campaign spending. Despite these rules, campaign spending has increased with every election, each election setting a new spending record ever since the race between Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush in 1992. In 2009 the Supreme Court opened the door for even more spending, by ruling that corporations cannot be barred from spending money on ads that advocate for their "issues" during an election campaign.

If candidates really cared about the United States, presidential nominees could save their campaign funds for more productive uses. Even before the dramatic increases in fundraising and spending in October, President Obama's and Republican nominee Mitt Romney's combined campaign funds added up to nearly \$1.25 billion. With this much money, both candidates would be able to supply millions of Americans with food for several months. Instead of spending money on campaign ads to get elected, where each candidate *claims* he will help America in a time of social and economic hardship, campaign money could go to much worthier causes that would have direct

impacts on the American people. Granted, some funds are needed to help the candidates get elected, but with only nine states that can truly decide the election, constant advertisements are not needed in states where swing voters are too few to make a significant impact. Take New Jersey, for example. Although New Jersey recently elected governor Chris Christie, a Republican, the majority of the electorate in the Garden State votes Democratic in presidential elections. Therefore, the thousands of people that might be swung towards Mitt Romney within New Jersey's borders will have a minimal impact on New Jersey's predicted Democratic votes. So, Mitt Romney should not bother advertising in states like New Jersey. Even in the swing states, many analysts question whether the endlessly repeated negative ads really change voters' minds, or whether a "fatigue factor" sets in relatively quickly.

It is depressing that candidates spend so much on running their campaigns when the money could go toward more productive uses. If both candidates were to cut back on their general campaign spending and apply their funds for a limited time only in places where the election is really competitive, they might save the nation a great deal. Some would argue that for their candidate to become the President is the only true way to help the American people, and thus that the candidate cannot afford to take risks by cutting campaign spending. While this view may have some merit, there are also other ways to reach the American people. If a candidate wants to convince people to elect him to office, then he should take concrete actions to make them think he really is a viable leader for America. Regardless of which candidate's campaign spending really pays off and gets him elected in 2012, four years from now, one can only expect the cost of running an election campaign to be higher.

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The Economic Landscape of the Future

BY PRADYUTH MAGANTI

What will the future economy of the United States look like if President Obama or Republican candidate Mitt Romney emerges victorious? Will there really be any radical change to the economy if Romney is elected? Since the problems that the U.S. faces are so immense, can there be a swift fix? While such questions are hard to answer, one thing is clear -- beliefs about the future of the economy will play a huge role in deciding who becomes the next president.

First, it is imperative to realize a few things. The issues that America faces right now are too big for a speedy resolution, and will take more than the next president's term to repair. In addition, the abolition of one or two government-funded programs won't get the U.S. out of the debt crisis. Additionally, it will be difficult for Obama, a Democrat, or Romney, a Republican, to accomplish much in Washington. The United States has a government that is deadlocked. Recent polls



ISABEL KIM (V)

project that neither political party will win the next election by massive margins. Whether a Republican or a Democrat gets elected to the Oval Office, neither will be able to get overwhelming support from Congress. For instance, many people agree that the federal tax code needs to be changed. It is far too convoluted for most Americans to comprehend. Yet, neither candidate, Democratic or Republican will gain approval to reform it, as the opposing party will decline and block whatever Obama or Romney proposes. Unfortunately, little can be achieved under this scenario.

Former Governor Mitt Romney has emphasized that he would like to revamp the tax structure. He wants to lower tax rates

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below Bush era levels, and claims he can compensate for the lost income by removing some deductions and tax loopholes. However, Romney has also said that he will not attempt to eradicate any of the more popular write-offs such as the income tax deduction on mortgage interest. Romney has still not detailed which major deductions he would like to remove in order to prevent his tax cuts from expanding the federal deficit.

On the other hand, President Obama claims that tax increases for the wealthy will help close the country's financial deficit. His plan supports the poor and middle class far more than the wealthy because the former groups are the ones that need the aid. Except for the income tax increases projected for the top one percent, most of Obama's tax hikes are modest and targeted. For example, starting in 2013, an extra .9% tax will be added for Medicare. Romney and Republican voters believe that these tax increases will fund further spending. This is far from the truth, as one of the Obama Administration's top priorities is to lower this country's financial debt, which

is at approximately 16 trillion dollars.

Obama wants to maintain the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly referred to as Obamacare. He believes that it will assure that more Americans can carry adequate health insurance and that it will reduce overall health care costs.

In contrast, Romney wants to repeal Obamacare and replace it with a plan he has not quite described thoroughly. If there were a company or business already providing health care under the guidelines in Obama's plan, it is hard to understand what to expect, as Romney has not spelled out his alternative. Romney is a strong proponent of state-based health care as opposed to federal intervention. He will give the power of deciding health care plans to individual states.

Mitt Romney strongly credits small businesses for employing more people than any other part of our economy. He contends that small businesses will be hurt the most by Obamacare since it is required for any business with more than 50 workers to provide medical insurance to all of their employees. However, as of October 2012, the unemployment rate had dropped to 7.8%. In September 2012, 873,000 people gained jobs, the best month since January 2003. Nobody in Washington even imagined that the unemployment rate would go below 8%, the so-called "magic number," under the Obama Administration. Clearly, Obama's health care reform isn't affecting the unemployment rate in a negative fashion.

Furthermore, Romney would like to repeal the "Dodd-Frank Financial Regulatory Reform Bill" because he believes it has too many regulations for corporations and will stifle economic expansion. The bill established

government agencies to oversee troubled financial companies that were hit hard by the recession. It keeps a check of whether or not they are practicing business according to federal standards. Obama put the bill in motion because he believed that it would prevent the types of fraud that might lead to another economic collapse.

If Romney plans to get elected, he needs to clearly indicate, in unequivocal terms, the details on how he plans to reduce the national deficit without raising taxes on the wealthy, how he will replace Obamacare with a viable alternative, and how he'll repeal the Dodd-Frank bill but still have "enough" regulations to promote economic growth safely. Meanwhile, Obama has to explain to the American people how he will stimulate further job growth under the current global economic crisis and how he will reduce the deficits for future economic prosperity.

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Gary Johnson: The Libertarian Candidate

BY DEREK HSUE

For many Americans, the current election is a battle between “the lesser of two evils”, as neither of the two major candidates seems particularly appealing. Barack Obama has failed to maintain many of his '08 promises, and his record on the economy has been less than stellar. Mitt Romney, on the other hand, has been constantly changing his stance on the issues and rewriting himself as a candidate. Thus, many voters are left to vote for the candidate they think will be “less bad” than the other one. However, there is still hope. Gary Johnson recently announced that he is running for President in the 2012 election as the Libertarian Party nominee. Although he is relatively unknown, citizens should seriously consider voting for the former New Mexican governor.

Libertarianism, upon which the foundations of the Libertarian Party are based, is a philosophy that emphasizes civil liberties and fiscal conservatism. Libertarians strongly believe in personal freedom and free enterprise. Governor Johnson, who calls himself “more socially liberal than Obama and more fiscally conservative than Romney,” embodies these ideas in all his policies.

Johnson strongly believes in the rights of the individual and the government’s duty to preserve and protect those liberties. As president, one of the policies he would reverse is the USA PATRIOT Act, a law signed by George Bush and extended by Barack Obama. Enacted as a response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Act significantly increases the power of the federal government to expand domestic surveillance and allows for warrantless wiretapping. This law heavily infringes on virtually all of the privacy rights guaranteed by the Constitution’s Fourth Amendment, which states that “the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and

effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause.” The institution of the USA PATRIOT act begs the question: if the federal government has the power to ignore the Constitution and spy on anyone, what exactly can’t it do? This law thus sets a dangerous precedent by devaluing individual privacy. While neither Obama nor Romney wants to repeal the act, Governor Johnson believes that “the freedoms on which America was founded are now under attack from the very people charged with protecting and upholding them.” He would repeal the act and restore the core values of the Constitution. Anyone who supports individual rights and freedoms knows which candidate would protect those values the most.

Governor Johnson’s stances on other social issues reflect his devotion to individual liberties. While he believes all

life is precious and must be protected, he is pro-choice because he believes that a woman “should be allowed to make her own decisions during pregnancy.” Additionally, Johnson believes that government should legally establish marriage equality. As president, Johnson would ensure that Americans can control their own lives and be treated equally no matter their sexual orientation.

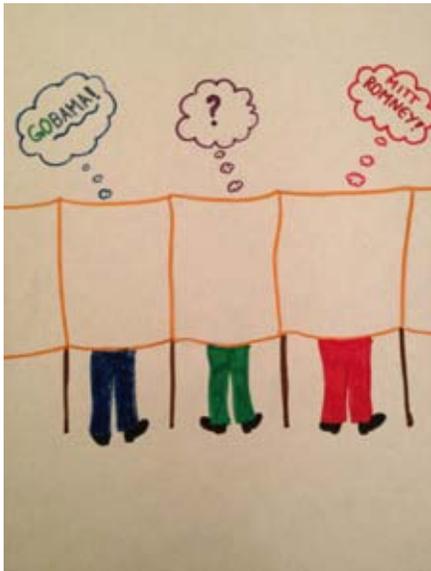
Politicians make promises all the time on what programs they would like to cut to remove excess spending. However, usually such promises are made just to garner support, and the candidates renege on their promises once elected and in office. There is good reason to believe that Gary Johnson is truly different, and that he has the fiscal knowledge and experience necessary. Johnson has an economic record as governor of New Mexico for eight years that proves he is the man to help America recover.

During his tenure as governor, Johnson cut the state’s spending by 10%, vetoed hundreds of bills that would add to spending, and eliminated the state’s budget deficit. The governor actually vetoed more bills during his eight years in office than the other 49 governors combined! Though the governor’s positions on spending may seem radical to some, as he eliminated many programs, Johnson demonstrated he was not afraid of the potential political impact of his budget cuts. After his eight years in office, New Mexico went from having a budget deficit to having a one billion dollar budget surplus.

As president, Johnson has stated that one of his key budget cuts would be in military spending. The amount of money America spends on its military every year currently stands at 695 billion dollars, having steadily grown over the past fifty years. We now account for 45% of the world’s total military spending. To put this into perspective, if we were to spend triple the annual military of budget of China, perhaps our closest military rival, we would be cutting our military

NEW MEXICO CAPITOL REPORT





CHARLOTTEZEE(V)

Romney would increase defense spending, and Obama would make marginal cuts, Gary Johnson has stated he would cut the defense budget by 43%. As the great Dwight Eisenhower once said, “Every dollar spent on the military is a dollar not spent on the poor.” Governor Johnson would make large cuts to the insanely large military budget to help revive our economy.

Johnson has also stated that he would make cuts in all earmark spending, stimulus packages, and drug war spending. He would also attempt to seriously reform the overly inefficient and bloated Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security programs. Governor Johnson would make a conscious effort to reform a variety of programs to help balance the federal budget.

A third party candidate has never won an American presidential election. The mainstream media simply fails to cover these candidates at all, and thus a large majority of Americans have never heard of Gary Johnson. If more people were to find out about Johnson, they would realize that his ideas are extremely attractive and pragmatic. He is the only candidate that will respect the privacy rights guaranteed by the Constitution. He is the only candidate that has a record of turning a state around from budget deficit to a surplus. Above all, he is the only candidate out there with the courage to make major cuts to our federal budget to

help reduce our deficit. If we wish to climb out of this recession and help our country, we must elect Gary Johnson.

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“If more people were to find out about Johnson, they would realize that his ideas are extremely attractive and pragmatic.”

budget by 40%! Every year, America wastes billions of dollars defending the security of other countries and researching more advanced weapons technology when we already have the best in the world. Take for example the F-35 “multirole fighter” aircraft. Even though America already has the world’s most advanced air force, the military is currently building brand new F-35s that cost an astonishing \$236 million each! The billions spent on these planes could be used to help our struggling economy. While

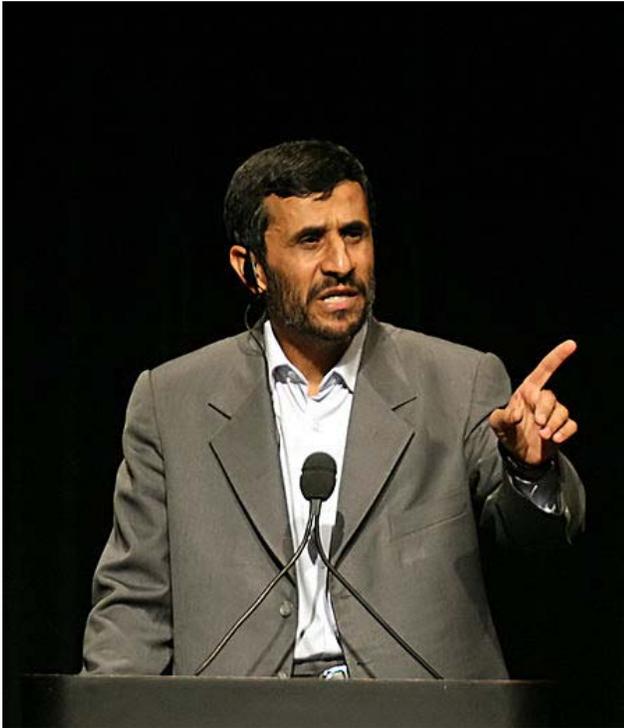
Iran as a 2012 Campaign Issue

BY ABHIRAM KARUPPUR

Many people in the U.S. have been fretting about the end of the world. December 21, 2012, the endpoint of the Mayan Calendar, is fast approaching. But even if the apocalypse does not happen, another disaster may occur in the near future. The potential for a nuclear attack from Iran is foreseeable soon, and not taking action could lead us to the brink of war. United States policy towards Iran is a hotly debated topic and a key issue for this year’s presidential election. While Governor Mitt Romney and President Barack Obama do share some similar views, they also present a stark contrast: while Barack Obama has been playing it safe for much of his presidency, Mitt Romney has taken a more definitive stance on how to prevent the grave national security threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.

The Middle East, and Iran in particular, have been front and center in American foreign policy since George W. Bush’s “axis of evil” speech after the September 11 attacks, and recent developments in the region have fueled political debate in America. Barack

Obama has been trying to prevent the Iranian government from building a nuclear weapon, but that initiative has so far not produced a clear cut end to Iran’s nuclear ambitions, a situation which increases the possibilities of regional war. In some countries, such as Egypt and Yemen, President Obama has wavered on whether or not to back the dictators who have been long time supporters of America, or the revolutionaries who are fighting for freedom. Syria is rolling in a bloody turmoil, and President Obama has thus far refused to intervene. His greatest successes have been the removal of Moammar Gaddhafi from power in Libya, and the killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011. Mitt Romney shares some of President Obama’s views on Middle East policy and criticized others. The candidates have similar stances on many issues, such as building missile defense systems in Europe to defend against Iran and fixing relations with Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Romney has strongly taken the side of the Israelis, a crucial ally of the United States, while Obama has tried to play a mediating role. Romney has also supported the protesters in Iran and Syria, and has attacked Obama for allegedly refusing to provide aid to these revolutionaries. While Romney has made



DANIELLA ZALCMAN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaking at Columbia University.

President Obama's poor handling of the Middle East a key feature of his campaign, he has not provided his own detailed plans for the future of the region or for the role of the US military there. Despite the lack of specifics, however, the issue of Iran is likely to play a significant role in the presidential election.

Many events of the past several years have contributed to the tense situation regarding Iran and have shaped the candidates' positions on the issue. The Iranian people have grown deeply unhappy with the current leadership, which held onto power through fraud in the 2009 presidential election. Freedom of speech has been curbed in Iran, whose security police are notorious for silencing opponents of high Iranian officials such as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. Oftentimes the police arbitrarily place dissidents under house arrest or in prison, and sometimes they simply kill them. In 2011, Iranian groups that supported the Arab Spring were suppressed. In February of that year opposition leaders called for a nationwide protest to parallel events in Tunisia and Syria; two days later, the government mandated that these protest organizers were to be executed. Throughout the crackdown Ahmadinejad has refused to allow the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate cases of human rights abuse. In essence, the Iranian government has been using martial law to prevent the people from expressing their opinions, marking it as a corrupt

and abusive regime. Iran's president has also voiced strong opposition to the continued existence of Israel as a Jewish state. This position is highly unpopular in the United States—Israel's staunchest ally. The situation of the people in Iran and the tense relations between Iran and the United States have become significant topics for debate in the current US presidential election campaign.

Since 2011, the Iranian crisis has been escalating, with Barack Obama and Mitt Romney actively voicing their opinions about this issue. Israel and the United States each consider Iran a threat to its national security, but perhaps not to the same degree. Israel has repeatedly raised the possibility that it may soon have to use military force to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, Iranian Revolutionary Guard leader Mohammed Ali Jafari has predicted that "an Israeli war on Iran 'will eventually happen' but the Jewish state will subsequently be destroyed." Thus far, President Obama has attempted to use diplomacy and economic sanctions to convince Ayatollah Khamenei to halt his country's nuclear program. However, the Iranian regime has refused to listen to Obama and has proceeded according to plan. Despite his assertions that the use of force is still an option for dealing with Iran, Obama has held off military action in the area despite repeated Israeli calls for a preemptive strike. Mitt Romney has leaped on Obama's supposed vacillation, and has regularly denounced Obama for being soft on Iran. According to his website, Mitt Romney firmly sides with Israel in the Iranian crisis as well as in the Palestinian conflict. However, he has not offered a specific plan of action in the area, such as whether to deploy troops or launch air strikes against Iranian nuclear installations. While both Obama and Romney favor setting up missile defense systems in Eastern Europe in response to the looming Iranian nuclear threat, Romney has expressed strong support for opposition groups in Iran, and has chastised Obama for standing on the sidelines during a massacre of "Green Revolution" protesters in 2009 (a phrase that references the reformist presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi's campaign color). Obama holds a pair of key advantages on the Iran issue, as he has had much more foreign policy experience than Romney and has kept Iran and Israel away from a confrontation until now. However, Obama's unclear stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will make it harder for him to convince pro-Israeli voters that he stands on Israel's side *vis á vis* Iran as well. Either way, the growing tensions in Iran may prove to be a definitive factor in the race for the White House.

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“The potential for a nuclear attack from Iran is foreseeable soon, and not taking action could lead us to the brink of war.”

The Anniversary of Occupy Wall Street

By ALLISON YU

Imagine walking down Fifth Avenue and being overwhelmed by shouts and chants coming from an ocean of people dressed in everything from elaborate Statue of Liberty costumes to make-shift bandana mouth-masks. A few more blocks down the street towards Union Square Park comes the pounding of drums beating to the melody of “Happy Birthday.” But if you had been in Lower Manhattan on Monday, September 17th 2012, you would also have seen some hundreds of people, protestors and police officers alike, confronting each other in petty skirmishes that often ended with bloody noses. Over one hundred and fifty people were arrested during the Occupy Wall Street Anniversary taking place that day. Representing the legendary “99%” that flooded the same streets last year, people from all walks of life came to lower Manhattan to remind the country that, in the words of activist Amin Husain, “the issues that brought us together a year ago haven’t gone away.” The people participating in the anniversary of Occupy Wall Street may believe that they were civilly voicing their protests, but the commotion they created outweighed their achievements. While the protestors may have earned some sympathy from onlookers, their vain attempt at stirring up memories of last year failed to convey a meaningful, focused message.

Protestors who participated in the anniversary held up signs claiming, “people are greater than profit” and “all our grievances are connected.” Even though the mottoes themselves sounded reasonable, the delivery and context did not support the message. Unlike last year’s serious and impassioned people who barely dressed up in costumes, the protestors this year lined the streets wearing “The Bain Monster,” and giant face pictures of Mitt Romney and President Obama. These costumes did not add anything but amusement to the anniversary’s cause and in fact became a distraction. Last year, people wore dollar signs over their mouths; it was simple but original and powerful. The Occupy Wall Street Anniversary seemed more like

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STAN HONDA/GETTY IMAGES

an early Halloween gathering than a strong-willed conglomeration of people who shared the same earnest viewpoint. Even the police, who were of course still rough when handling protestors who resisted arrest, smiled and laughed with passersby. The whole mood and environment of the protest was thus all too lighthearted for the grave issues at stake. The anniversary turned out to be an outlet for individual creativity; actors read out skits about corruption and the government, putting on a show for the crowd. The protestors and performers did not actually unify as a single group. Though their agendas may all have brought them to one location and their ideas more or less corroborated each other’s, the event just seemed too ineffectual to advance their cause.

The 185-plus arrests of people trying to block the paths leading to the New York Stock Exchange did show that some people took notice of this event. The “1%” that the dissenters are rallying against (the banks, the mortgage industry, the insurance industry, and anyone else who still has a lucrative job on Wall Street) basically all shared the same point of view when dealing with the disruptive protestors: it’s getting a little tiresome. The protestors have the right to exercise their freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, but their protests lacked the passion of last year. The issues are still relevant: income inequality and the corrupt greed of major corporations are still evident throughout the country. But since the protests have only raised awareness of social and economic problems in America and have not actually changed anything, it appears to be unproductive and even futile to keep approaching the same topics in the same way. The original Occupy Wall Street achieved the first steps in what they hoped would be a legacy. They prevented wrongful foreclosures and promoted meaningful reforms in environmental, economic and social

policies. So because the anniversary had no achievements of its own but only reiterated the old ones, their overall effort “lost some of its visibility,” says Steve Casson, the artistic director of the Civilians. The champions of the 99% had the right idea, to engage in civil disobedience and to push for a day of reflection. But their execution lacked luster and organization when they needed unified action.

Indeed, our governmental system needs fixing and revitalizing. But in order to get this job done, the protest movement has to reform itself. Occupy Wall Street activists are right in believing that the financial system of America favors the rich and the powerful at the expense of ordinary citizens. They are wrong, though, in believing that a day’s worth of meandering marches will change much. What they need is leadership that projects a strong voice and can rally the crowds into one mass. Some supporters of this cause believe that their non-violent protests do not need a leader to guide them because that would defeat the purpose of promoting equality. However, they

do need a spokesperson who can voice Occupy Wall Street’s most important concerns. Today’s multiple causes become garbled because of all the noise they create, thereby reducing the movement’s potential influence. In order to be successful, Occupy Wall Street needs a focus that will filter out the more trivial complaints. They should stay informed and learn from past protests like the 1960s civil rights movement in order to stay relevant in the world.

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Dark Energy: The Darkest Part of Our Universe

BY ANDREW ALDER

Space: The Final Frontier. Just what exactly is out there? In the 17th century, Galileo made important discoveries that changed the way we thought about the Earth and what was beyond it. Many years later, through intensive space research, we have discovered a great deal about the sun and the moon, and counted more than 100 billion stars, 400 planets, and many galaxies similar to ours. Yet all of the planets, stars and galaxies we have found thus far only make up about 4 percent of the universe.

So what makes up the rest of the universe? What is it that we aren’t seeing already? That’s the tricky part. We do “see” it, but not through optical means; the remainder of the universe is all around us in the forms of dark matter and dark energy. While dark matter

only accounts for 23 percent of the universe, dark energy takes up an astounding 73 percent. This intangible energy allows the universe to constantly accelerate and how it does that is one of the greatest mysteries of the universe.

The discovery of dark energy began in 1998 when the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the High-Z Supernova Search measured the explosions of supernovas to calculate the expansion rate of the universe. The explosions of stars would light up pieces of the universe and this would be used to track exactly how fast the universe was moving. Both teams chose supernovas that were approximately 5 billion light years away. The amount of time it would take for the supernovas’ redshifts, or changes in light wavelengths, to be visible through a telescope would give the researchers a clue to their answer. Based on Einstein’s theory of General Relativity, gravity would cause all the planets and stars in the universe to pull on each other, thus slowing the expansion. Yet to the researchers’ surprise, they found that the light from the supernovas was much dimmer than they had expected, meaning that the explosion was getting farther away from their sight. Contrary to popular belief at the time, the universe was indeed expanding, and no one was quite sure why.

Although scientists didn’t believe it at first, a theory formerly advanced by Albert Einstein - that what was assumed to be the empty vacuum of space had energy of its own - was starting to come to light once again. Einstein had proposed that empty space has energy that acts repulsively, countering the effects of gravity and therefore pushing the universe farther apart. This energy was called the cosmological constant, later known as dark energy, the finding of which was a huge shock to the scientific world.

To add to all the confusion, studies done on the light emitted by supernovas from long ago indicate that gravity’s force was once much stronger than that of dark energy. Light from a supernova may take billions of years to be visible through a telescope. Through his research on distant, and thus ancient, supernovas, a cosmologist,

ISABEL KIM (V)



“We know one thing for sure: in a few million years, dark energy will be the defining factor in human life and the universe itself.”

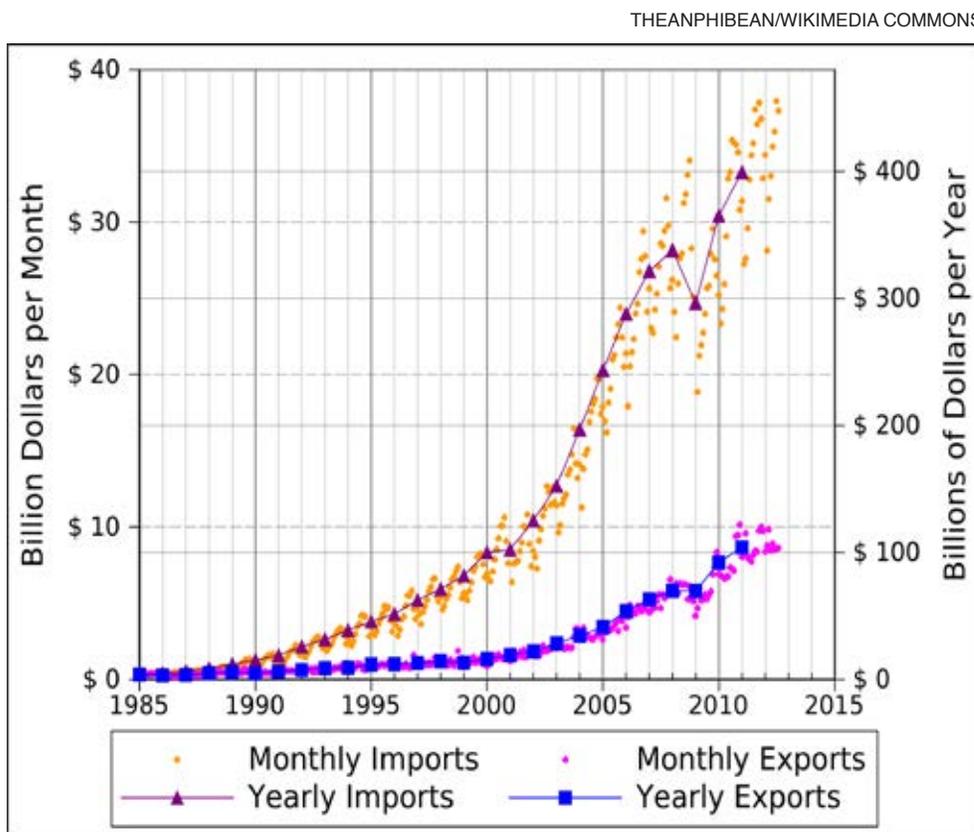
Adam Riess, discovered that the expansion of the universe following the “big bang” was much slower than it is at present. However, the force of gravity between each galaxy eventually weakened; we now know that dark energy was responsible for overpowering gravity and accelerating the expansion of the universe.

Because much is still unknown about this powerful substance, dark energy has become a topic of heated debate among many scientists who are attempting to gauge its potential. Some scientists do not believe that dark energy exists at all, demanding more evidence on the subject. They attribute the expansion of the universe to such things as common microwave radiation. That being said, others agree that the existence of dark energy may either result in the Big Rip or the Big Crunch. The Big Rip is the theory that spatial expansion is cyclic; the expansion of space will create even more dark energy, which in turn, causes the expansion of the universe to go on indefinitely. As a result, everything around us would begin to be pulled apart, and as time goes on, even our individual atoms would be slowly pulled apart. It would be no exaggeration to refer to this as a version of the end of the universe. On the other hand, the Big Crunch will take place if the density of dark energy lessens. If this were to happen to a point where the universe can no longer expand, it will become dominated

by gravitational forces. The universe would slowly pull itself together without the presence of dark energy and become a giant black hole that sucks everything inside of it until there is absolutely nothing left. This is one of the most popular versions of the end of the universe.

Will dark energy continue to increase its repulsive force and cause the Big Rip? Or will it disappear completely and allow our universe to contract into nothing? The probability of either of these events is uncertain, and is strictly based on theory, as dark energy is still the largest mystery in our understanding of space. While we are certain that it is real (99.996% certain to be exact), we are unsure of its capabilities. We know one thing for sure: in a few million years, dark energy will be the defining factor in human life and the universe itself.

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complex relationship that involves a number of different fields, from trade and commerce to peace and security. China is America’s largest trading partner, and the U.S. is China’s largest trading partner. The American consumer culture and our insatiable appetite for buying on credit has led to a massive U.S. trading deficit that is aggravated by the Chinese government’s policies regarding currency valuation, allegedly unfair trade practices, and large subsidies of state-owned industries. China is also the largest foreign holder of U.S. national debt, with over \$1 trillion in U.S. treasury securities. China also has a substantial military, as the second biggest defense spender with over three million active and reserve military personnel. On every front, China is a force to be reckoned with, and any major confrontation in the Western Pacific involving them would seriously destabilize the entire region, if

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Imports and exports between the United States and China according to the US Census Bureau

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not the entire world.

According to independent sources such as the Council on Foreign Relations, the Brookings Institute, and China-U.S. Focus, Barack Obama's four years in office thus far have been moderately successful. President Obama came into office seeking to create a comprehensive partnership with China and to hold the country accountable for the responsibilities of an emerging superpower. The president has pushed for better bilateral relations and, wherever possible, emphasized the importance of the United States' partnership with China. However, even with an unprecedented number of face-to-face meetings and telephone calls between the two heads of state as well as between senior cabinet officials, neither country really trusts the other. Along these lines, Obama has pledged to step up the U.S. military presence in the Pacific and strengthen regional alliances and economic ties with other countries that are concerned with China's growing assertiveness in the region. Over the past few years, Leon Panetta's Pentagon has prepared a new war-plan that's been nicknamed "Air-Sea-Battle." This new strategy uses the strength and long range of U.S. Navy and Air Force platforms to wage war against an enemy trying to keep the U.S. military out of specific areas by holding key choke points and cutting off U.S. supply lines. While the Defense Department, following its longstanding policy of "strategic ambiguity," maintains that Air-Sea-Battle is applicable to any country, like Iran or North Korea for example, it seems clear that ASB was designed primarily as a way to check Chinese aggression in the Taiwan Strait or the South China Sea.

President Obama has extended his two-track policy (think "carrot and stick") to the economic sphere as well. While he is open to strengthening economic ties with China, the president has reiterated that China needs to clean up its act to be worthy of its stature as a global economic powerhouse. This approach can be seen at work in the negotiations for the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP. An ambitious restructuring of the 2005 Trans-Pacific Economic Partnership Agreement, this closed-door multilateral free trade agreement currently involves a number of Southeast Asian and Pacific Rim countries, namely Australia, New Zealand, Brunei, Singapore, and Vietnam. In a 2012 meeting

of the leaders of the nations involved, President Obama did not explicitly say that China would be excluded from the group, but he proposed standards of transparency, labor rights, and reciprocity for the TPP that would be beyond China's current practices. This recommendation was likely driven by the broad perception that China's prosperity during the Great Recession has been a direct result of unfair trade practices that give its businesses an edge over those of the rest of the world. President Obama, along with voicing his frustrations, has challenged

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China on many of its policies and has sought action on several disputes in international courts.

If President Obama is re-elected for another term, it is reasonable to expect that he will continue to follow the present convention of prudent economic and strategic interactions with China. For the last four years, the president has been trying to strike a balance that shows respect towards China as the largest U.S. lender, that demands higher expectations of China as the projected largest global economy by 2016, and that maintains a position of U.S. strength that will discourage China from irresponsibly flexing its muscles

and destabilizing the Pacific. Obama will continue to pursue a posture that does not suggest a zero-sum game, whether it is for natural resources or global prestige, but rather a larger partnership that will allow China and the United States to pursue prosperity together.

If President Obama's stance has been one of hope for mutual cooperation, but readiness for potential conflict, Mitt Romney intends to treat China like the new Soviet Union. While Obama has tried to be diplomatic with China, Romney has pledged to call them out as a currency manipulator on his very first day on the job, challenging China head-on early and often. He has vowed to rapidly step up U.S. military presence in the Pacific with the specific and declared intention of countering Chinese ambitions. The risk of devastating armed conflict aside, perhaps most significant aspect about Romney's proclamation is its threat to break the American tradition of strategic ambiguity that previous presidents, including Obama, have so often employed. Also, continuing a disturbing trend in the Republican Party, Romney has thus far failed to take into account the risks of a blunt, head-on charge on Chinese economic and core international interests. Experts at the Brookings Institute have cautioned that Romney's policy stance makes many dangerous assumptions. In particular, Romney has indicated that China is so heavily dependent on exports to America that the U.S. could challenge China directly without repercussions to its own economy. However, most experts believe that there would be severe risks and economic fallout for both sides as well as for the regional bystanders. In addition, Romney's proposal for a rapid military buildup against China would be extremely expensive and financially unsustainable. Further, leading authorities worry about the uncertainty that would come from a China made to feel cornered, insecure and under threat. But above all, what puts fear in the hearts of economists and military analysts about the Romney position is his answer to the question of what will be China's competitive response to an overt economic and strategic offensive aimed at its core interests. According to Romney, there will be none, which is the one answer that nobody finds credible.

The Troubling Future of United States - China Relations

BY HUNTER STIRES

If language is a reflection of thought, then Mitt Romney doesn't like China. On his campaign webpage, Romney cautions "China must be discouraged from attempting to intimidate or dominate neighboring states." He characterizes China's emerging strength as "dramatically changing the strategic map of the world," ominously warns that "the potential for conflict with an authoritarian China could rise as its power grows," and finally, issues an outright threat

stating that "Mitt Romney will implement a strategy that makes the path of regional hegemony for China far more costly than the alternative path of becoming a responsible partner in the international system."

While Mitt Romney makes loud, provocative declarations on China, President Obama's position is a little more nuanced. In general Obama follows Teddy Roosevelt's philosophy of "speak softly and carry a big stick," or alternatively, "speak carefully and have a really big navy." While on his "National Security" webpage Obama makes references to strengthening "alliances around

the world with friends like...our partners in Asia," he has recently declared that "the United States is a Pacific power" and started a major strategic shift to a "Pacific-first" military policy. Most importantly, the voters have four years of experience to draw upon for President Obama. Either way, there is a stark ideological contrast on foreign policy toward China between the two people who are vying to be the next president of the United States.

So what are the issues on the table? The United States and China have a

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ADAM K. THOMAS/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



The aircraft carrier USS George Washington transits the Pacific Ocean. George Washington, the Navy's only permanently forward-deployed aircraft carrier, is participating in a yearly bilateral exercise with the U.S. Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.