

# A Divided Nation

continued **▲** from front

flooded Louisiana coast. He vowed government officials would find out "what can we do to make sure it doesn't happen again."

At times like these, "nobody's a Democrat or a Republican, we're all just Americans looking out for one another," said the president, flanked by local and state officials from both parties, after inspecting some of the damage inflicted by the storm and hugging some of its victims.

Romney paid a similarly nonpartisan visit last Friday to the flooded region but made no reference at the time to federal aid.

Obama has been and will be arguing that Romney brings nothing more to his quest for the White House than plans and policies that are a reprise of those employed by former Republican President George W. Bush, under whose watch the Great Recession began and the financial collapse occurred.

Most Americans still hold Bush responsible for the start of the economic difficulties afflicting the U.S., but they are split on which candidate is best equipped to return the country to robust growth.

Obama foresaw the difficulties he faced in a Chicago speech on the

cold night of his victory as the nation's first African-American president nearly four years ago.

"The road ahead will be long," he said solemnly that November night in Chicago, displaying none of the euphoria of his supporters. "Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year, or even one term. But, America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there."

That's a message Obama will have to repeat vigorously under attack from Romney who contends the president is a nice guy who has failed to make things better. The Republican candidate drew a line under that message in a statement Monday, the U.S. Labor Day holiday that celebrates workers and marks the unofficial end of the summer holiday season.

Romney said the holiday was "a chance to celebrate the strong American work ethic," but added: "For far too many Americans, today is another day of worrying when their next paycheck will come."

Romney will be hitting hard on his business expertise as co-founder of Bain Capital, a private equity firm through which he amassed a quarter-million dollar fortune. Polls show most Americans see Romney as the

better candidate to handle the U.S. economy. Obama is seen as by far the most likable and better able to understand the problems of ordinary Americans. Overall the two candidates are in one of the closest



President Obama waves to supporters after speaking at a Labor Day rally Monday in Toledo, Ohio.

presidential contests in recent U.S. history.

Their vision of America's future differs across the board and, per-

haps, the subtexts in that regard will be the deciding factor.

Obama will be pressing hard on his contention that there are and will be vast areas where the government can help fix the economy and put a safety net under Americans who have been hard hit in the aftermath of the steep downturn. He's finally pushing hard in support of the health care overhaul he pushed through

He will recall that he ended the war in Iraq at the end of last year, as promised, and will put an end to the U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan in 2014.

And he holds a powerful trump card: His decision to order the daring Navy SEAL raid that killed terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden at his hideout deep in Pakistan.

Vice President Joe Biden, speak-

ing to workers in Detroit on Monday, said he could put it all on a bumper sticker. "Osama bin Laden is dead, General Motors is alive."

Both Obama and Biden played heavily to American workers in their Labor Day speeches, particularly to those whose jobs depend on the auto industry.

Obama injected that industry with huge amounts of government money in the earliest days of his administration, preventing General Motors and Chrysler Corp. from likely going out of business, resulting in more than 1 million workers losing their jobs.

Romney opposed the auto bailout and accuses Obama of profligate government spending that he contends has done little to lift the country out of the economic morass.

As they wrestle over the role of government, when all the chaff is separated out, voters will be left with a decision about which candidate's vision best accords with their view of the nation.

Obama will argue government does and can help the people who pay taxes to keep it in operation. Romney will counter that government is too involved in Americans' lives and that everyone will be better off under his leadership, one designed, he says, to minimize federal involvement.

It's a classic Democratic versus Republican argument but one that's bulked up as if on steroids of late as the deeply conservative tea party movement gains increasing control over the Republican Party with demands for lower taxes and smaller government.

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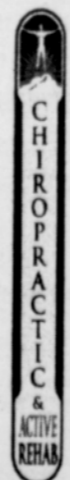
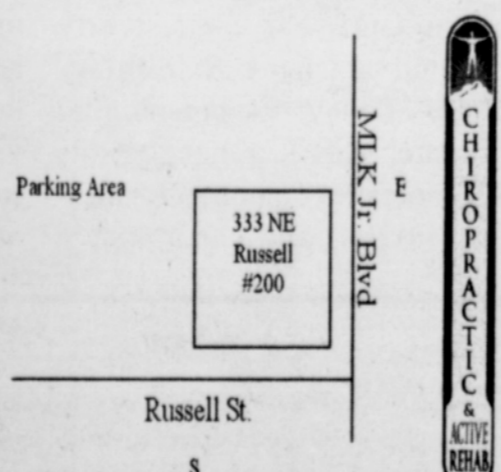
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