Clinton tears into Trump's taxes; he stands by 'brilliant' use of loopholes

By KEN THOMAS and JONATHAN LEMIRE
Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio — Hillary Clinton tore into Donald Trump's tax maneuvering, business skills and trustworthiness Monday as she sought to capitalize on news that the New York real estate mogul may have paid no federal taxes for years. Unfazed, he boasted of using U.S. tax laws "brilliantly" and cast himself as a savvy business survivor poised to save a reeling nation.

Campaigning at a Toledo train station, Clinton castigated Trump as a cold-hearted and bungling businessman who "represents the same rigged system that he claims he's going to change." She called for a new law requiring presidential candidates from major parties to release their tax returns, as Trump has refused to do, and she accused him of shirking his responsibility as a taxpayer.

"He's taken corporate excess and made a business model out of it," she said. "It's Trump first and everyone else last."

The Democrat's broadside was her first response to a weekend *New York Times* report that Trump claimed a loss of nearly $916 million in a single year on his personal tax filings. *The Times* said the size of the loss could have allowed him to avoid federal taxes for nearly two decades, an assertion his campaign neither confirmed nor disputed.

Nor did Trump.

Instead, at a Colorado rally, he portrayed himself as a man who bounced back from financial losses, will recover from a currently difficult stretch of the campaign and propel the nation to a similar turnaround.

"On Nov. 8, America's comeback begins," he told cheering supporters in Pueblo.

As for questions about his tax history, Trump said he had "brilliantly used those laws ... legally used the tax laws to my benefit and to the benefit of my company, my investors and my employees."

"The unfairness of the tax laws is unbelievable. It's something I've been talking about for a long time, despite, frankly, being a big beneficiary of the laws," Trump told the crowd in Pueblo. "But I'm working for you now. I'm not working for Trump."

He acknowledged business failures as well as successes but declared, "I'm still here."

He said that "our country is in need of a major comeback," just like the one he was able to pull off after near-financial collapse in the 1990s — and the one, he implied, he would make from his recent drop in the polls after a difficult campaign week.

Several of Trump's surrogates also rallied to note that the *Times* report did not allege wrongdoing and they contended the Republican presidential candidate was a "genius" for using the tax system to rebuild his fortune.

At the same time, the Clinton campaign seized on the comment with a new TV ad, asking, "If not paying taxes makes him smart, what does that make the rest of us?"

In her remarks in Ohio, Clinton mocked: "What kind of genius loses a billion dollars in a single year?"

Other Trump troubles mounted.

Former cast and crew members from the reality TV show "The Apprentice" described for the first time his treatment of women on the set. Show insiders told The Associated Press that Trump rated female contestants by the size of their breasts and talked about which ones he'd like to have sex with.

The campaign issued a broad denial, calling the claims "totally false."

Also Monday, the New York attorney general's office ordered the Trump Foundation to immediately stop fundraising in the state, saying it isn't registered to do so.

The back-to-back bad news piled on a week of Trump missteps and his increasingly aggressive personal attacks on Clinton. Since a rocky debate last week, Trump has engaged in a distracting feud with a former beauty queen he called "Miss Piggy" because she gained weight during her reign. He seemed to try to shift the conversation Saturday night when he suggested, without evidence, that Clinton may have cheated on her husband.

Trump's campaign is searching for a way to rattle Clinton — while also getting control of its own message. The new revelations only make that harder. While the incomplete tax records published by the *Times* show no irregularities, the size of Trump's loss cuts at a core tenet of his presidential bid — his remarkable business success. Meanwhile, his boorish comments are threatening to turn away female voters.

Feds lay off sprawling protest camp

By JAMES MACPHERSON
Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. — The sprawling encampment that's a living protest against the four-state Dakota Access pipeline has most everything it needs to be self-sustaining — food, firewood, fresh water and shelter. Everything, that is, except permission to be on the federal land in North Dakota.

Federal officials say they won't evict the Oceti Sakowin, or Seven Council Fires camp, due to free speech reasons, even though it's on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers land near the confluence of the Missouri and Cannonball rivers that many Native Americans believe is still rightfully owned by the Standing Rock Sioux under a nearly 150-year-old treaty.

"We're not leaving until we defeat this big black snake," camp spokesman Cody Hall said of the pipeline.

But residents in the area have expressed feeling unsafe and frustrated with how the protest has swelled to scores of self-described "water protectors" who have joined the tribe's fight, and Republican U.S. Rep. Kevin Cramer — North Dakota's lone voice in the House — says the camp is illegal. He blames the agency for looking the other way.

"If that camp was full of people advocating for fossil fuels, they would have been removed by now," Cramer said. "There is some discretionary enforcement going on."

The camp is the overflow from smaller private and permitted protest sites nearby and began growing in August. The gathering has been called the largest gathering of Native American tribes in a century, all there to protest Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners' $3.8 billion Dakota Access pipeline, which tribal officials believe threatens sacred sites and a river that's a source of water for millions.

AP Photo/James MacPherson

In this Sept. 14, 2016 file photo, a volunteer sorts through donated food near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota.

AP Photo/James MacPherson

In this Sept. 9, 2016 file photo, Phil Daw Sr., of Albuquerque, New Mexico, helps cook beef stew to feed hundreds at an encampment near North Dakota's Standing Rock Sioux reservation.

Corps spokeswoman Eileen Williamson said the agency is "encouraging" people to relocate to areas where there is a permit, such as a nearby smaller camp where demonstrators have been allowed to legally protest on federal lands managed by the agency.

"We don't have the physical ability to go out and evict people — it gives the appearance of not protecting free speech," she said. "Our hands are really tied."

Cramer believes the "bigger problem" of the camp is "the illegal activity that may be orchestrated from there" — meaning a base to launch interference with pipeline construction miles away. About 95 people have been arrested in several pipeline protests — some as far as 70 miles away from the camp — since early August, but none at the camp itself. Protesters deny state officials' charge, with Hall saying the camp promotes "peaceful" protest.

"People don't leave from the camp with malicious intent to do harm," Hall said. "There are always going to be a few bad eggs in any group you can't get the message to."

Ranchers and farmers in the area are wary of the growing number of protesters and are fearful of damage to their fields and pastures, Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier said.

"We've had several reports of people down there getting stopped on the road and being intimidated to hay that has been stolen to grazing animals without permission," he said.

Matthew Rebenitsch, who has a ranch just a few miles from the encampment, said he and his neighbors worry about talking publicly about the situation.

"To be honest, no one around here wants to say anything because we're afraid they will come and threaten us," he said. "I'll say this, every rancher around here is packing and people are locking their doors — and no one has ever locked a door in their entire life."

Republican state Rep. James Schmidt, who also farms and ranches nearby, said he and his neighbors are more cautious.

"I'm starting to see a lot more guns in the back of pickup trucks. All it is going to take is one incident and emotions are going to overtake the situation," he said.

Kaine, Pence ready for main stage

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — With the first presidential debate complete and its spin cycle nearly over, the two understudies are getting ready to take the main stage.

The vice presidential debate Tuesday at 6 p.m. will be the only time Republican Mike Pence and Democrat Tim Kaine will for the most part have the nation's political attention all to themselves, away from their much better-known running mates.

The stakes will be lower than the three presidential debates, but will give each largely undefined candidate a chance to make a mark on a national audience.

Running mates rarely overshadow the top of the ticket, although Sarah Palin caused a sensation as Republican John McCain's pick in 2008. But voters always have a reason to size up the people who would be next in line for the presidency.

The 2016 candidates are older than the norm. Though their doctors said they are fit to serve, Hillary Clinton, who will be 69 before the election, has had several health problems in recent years while Donald Trump, 70, has for months held off disclosing much about his own fitness.

Pence, Trump's running mate, is taking a decidedly un-Trump like approach to the vice presidential debate. He's preparing for it.

The Indiana governor and former 12-year congressman held mock debate sessions with Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker as a stand-in, studying up on issues likely to be raised and making sure he avoids the criticisms of being unprepared that dogged Trump after his uneven performance a week ago. "We're going to do our level best to be ready," Pence told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt this past week.

Pence was spending the weekend back home in Indianapolis, taking a break from campaign travel to be with his family and continue informal debate preparations, spokesman Marc Lotter said.

Clinton's running mate, a former Virginia governor and current U.S. senator, spent several days preparing for the debate in Raleigh, North Carolina, and in his hometown of Richmond, Virginia. The debate will take place at Longwood University, about an hour west of Richmond.

Helping Kaine is Washington, D.C., lawyer Robert Barnett, a veteran of prepping Democrats for debates. Kaine said he's been "thinking hard" about what Pence's record says "about the guy who chose him, because it really is more about Donald Trump than it is about Gov. Pence."