

US presidential campaign comes to an end

Patrick Martin
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The last weekend of the 2012 US presidential election campaign was marked by rallies for both Democratic President Barack Obama and his Republican challenger Mitt Romney in a handful of closely contested states, while the deluge of television commercials continues right up to the opening of the polls on Tuesday.

The itineraries of the two candidates were limited to the so-called battleground states, with Obama traveling on the weekend from Ohio to Iowa, Virginia, New Hampshire, Florida, Colorado and back to Ohio. On Monday he visits Colorado and Wisconsin before a final campaign rally in Iowa.

Romney scrapped plans to visit Nevada, where Obama has pulled ahead, in favor of visits to New Hampshire, Iowa, Colorado, Iowa again, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

The electoral map has remained virtually unchanged since the summer, with Obama leading in 18 states and the District of Columbia, accounting for 237 electoral votes, while Romney leads in 23 states with 191 electoral votes. A majority in the Electoral College is 270 electoral votes.

Of the nine remaining states, with 110 electoral votes, Obama is leading in pre-election polls in eight, all but North Carolina, but in some cases only by a narrow margin.

More than 27 million people have already voted in 34 states and the District of Columbia, according to press summaries published over the weekend. In the six battleground states that register voters by party, Democratic voters outnumbered Republicans among early voters in Florida, Iowa, Nevada, North Carolina and Ohio, while Republicans led in Colorado.

The closeness of the contest and the proliferation of early, absentee and mail-in voting make projections of the outcome on Tuesday night very problematic. A consortium of five television networks and the Associated Press will combine phone surveys of early

voters, exit polls conducted on Election Day and actual counts at selected precincts in a way that gives vast scope for political manipulation.

It is worth recalling that during the long night of vote-counting in Florida in the 2000 presidential election, Fox News falsely called the state for Bush in an effort, largely successful, to shape the ensuing media coverage of the post-election recount campaign.

The 2012 campaign is the most expensive in American history, with \$3 billion funneled into the presidential contest, \$1 billion for each of the candidates and another \$1 billion from political action committees funded by the super-rich, largely for Romney. Another \$3 billion has been spent on contests for 33 US Senate seats, 435 seats in the House of Representatives, and numerous state and local government offices.

The election campaign has also been the most superficial, cynical and misleading in American history. This weekend was no exception, as both Obama and Romney fought for possession of the emptiest and most vapid of election slogans—"change"—while both candidates sought to conceal as much as possible their virtually identical plans for the post-election period.

Neither candidate will tell the American people the truth: the next administration, whether headed by a Democrat or a Republican, will launch attacks on the living standards, social benefits and democratic rights of the American people on a scale never before seen. This will be combined with stepped-up military aggression overseas, from the Middle East to the Pacific.

Whether Obama or Romney is inaugurated next January 20 will affect only the details of this political prospectus, not its broad outlines. Both candidates, and the parties they head, represent and defend the interests of the American financial elite, the most reactionary

and rapacious social force on the planet.

In the closing days of the campaign, Obama and the Democrats, and their supporters among liberal and pseudo-left groups, made a last-ditch appeal to the fears among working people of the policies proposed by the Republican Party. At the same, they reaffirmed their commitment to the ruling class to carry out policies that are virtually indistinguishable.

This was the purpose of an op-ed column by Obama published over the weekend in the *Wall Street Journal*, side by side with a similar piece by Romney. Addressing his audience of fat cats and corporate executives in the leading US business newspaper, Obama reiterated his loyalty to capitalism, writing, “Our free market is the engine of America’s progress, driven by risk-takers, innovators and dreamers.”

He claimed that his policies would be better for corporate America, because of federal support for scientific research, job training for workers and favorable tax policies. He pledged to “reduce our deficit by cutting where we can and asking the wealthiest to go back to the income-tax rates they paid under President Clinton. I’ve worked with Republicans to cut a trillion dollars of spending, and I’ll do more. I’ll work with anyone of any party to move this country forward.”

Romney made similar pledges to act in a “bipartisan” fashion in statements to several rallies over the weekend.

The Democratic and Republican candidates are reassuring the ruling class that once the election is over, whatever the outcome, they will carry out the principal demands of Wall Street: dramatic cuts in social spending, particularly for entitlement programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, to slash the federal deficit.

There is breathtaking cynicism involved here. Each candidate has accused the other of supporting enormous cuts in Medicare spending, while claiming to defend the program that underwrites health care services for tens of millions of elderly and retired people. The truth is that *both* candidates support such cuts, but seek to conceal this fact from the American people until after the election.

Similarly, the two campaigns have never openly discussed the plans for US military intervention in Syria and war against Iran, although detailed

preparations are taking place at the Pentagon, in Israel, in the Persian Gulf, and in other locations where US military forces are deployed.



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