



Romney's path to White House victory: Sharpen economic argument, win over women and Hispanics

By Brian Hughes, Examiner Staff Writer - *September 23, 2012*

Mitt Romney is losing.

A handful of new battleground state polls brought bad news to the GOP nominee after arguably the roughest week of his presidential campaign.

Grumbling from Republican operatives about how Romney is running his campaign intensified amid concerns over President Obama gaining ground in key states despite his failure to turn around a stagnant economy.

With many voters just tuning into the campaign, and the first presidential debate still two weeks away, Romney has time to change the dynamics of the race, according to political insiders.

Here's a blueprint for how Romney can win in November.

- **Sharpen his economic pitch to middle-class voters**

The trend that has greatly alarmed Romney's supporters is the increasing number of voters who say Obama is better equipped to right the economy.

Romney's campaign until now has been focused almost exclusively on Obama's economic stewardship. Besides denouncing what hasn't worked over the last four years, however, Romney needs to start explaining his economic plan and how it would help the middle class, strategists said.

"He needs to add emphasis to the retail sale," Republican strategist Ron Bonjean said. "He needs to get out from behind the podium and have more events where he interacts with middle-class voters."

Heeding that sentiment, Romney and his running mate, Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan, will start a three-day bus tour in Ohio Monday as part of a new focus on battleground states.

- **Close the gap with women**

Romney's efforts are encumbered by his party's lack of standing among women. Female voters gave Obama a 13-percentage-point advantage over Republican John McCain in 2008 and they are even less enthusiastic about Romney.

Obama and Democrats accused Republicans of waging a "war on women," focusing the debate on abortion and contraceptives, women's issues that favor Democrats. If he can broaden that debate, Romney probably wouldn't win among women overall but he could close the gap with Obama, particularly among white, suburban women, strategists said.

"I don't think Mitt Romney is going to sit down with a group of women and miraculously relate to them; that's not who he is," Patrick Griffin, a senior fellow with the New Hampshire Institute of Politics, said. "But this is not the campaign of Venus and Mars. Women are concerned about the economy and the deficit. Women run household finances -- put the debate in those terms."

• **Present himself as a capable commander in chief**

Foreign affairs have taken a back seat to domestic issues in the campaign since voters are focused primarily on their pocketbooks. But the recent surge in violence and anti-American sentiment around the globe have altered that sentiment, at least temporarily.

And while Republicans traditionally have an edge on national security issues, Romney is up against a president with a run of foreign policy successes, including killing Osama bin Laden. Romney's also suffered several self-inflicted wounds on the international front, including suggesting London wasn't ready to host the Olympics. Yet, Romney needs to move beyond his CEO persona and demonstrate foreign policy chops if he wants to look presidential, analysts said.

"Voters can't be very happy with what they're seeing take place in many countries we have been supporting for years," Christopher Preble, vice president for Defense and Foreign Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, said. "Romney needs to spell out how his policies would be dramatically different from President Obama's but not in the mold of George W. Bush. He doesn't seem eager to do that, though."

• **Win over Hispanic voters**

Obama conceded last week that his biggest failure has been an inability to deliver comprehensive immigration reform.

The admission couldn't have come at a better time for Romney, who needs to improve his current standing with the nation's fastest-growing voting bloc.

Although Obama enjoys a commanding lead among Hispanics, analysts said the administration's record number of deportations could weaken that support and prompt some Hispanics to crossover and back Romney -- as long as the Republican gives them a reason.

"I think the Romney campaign should have started earlier, but yes, they can absolutely make inroads with Latinos," Alfonso Aguilar, executive director of the

Latino Partnership for Conservative Principles, said. "Since the convention, they're running more ads in Spanish, doing more interviews addressing the issues of immigration. We'll see movement there."

- **Enter the first presidential debate with momentum**

Millions of viewers will watch the presidential debate on Oct. 3 in Colorado. But Romney needs to give independent voters in particular a reason to tune in. To do that, however, Republicans say Romney must reverse the current course of his campaign.