Obama, Romney campaign with eye on storm forecast

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President Barack Obama points towards supporters after speaking at a campaign event at Elm Street Middle School, Saturday, Oct. 27, 2012 in Nashua, N.H. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

(AP)—With an eye on a huge storm threatening the U.S. East Coast, President Barack Obama and Republican Mitt Romney began a 10-day sprint to the finish line in a deadlocked contest revolving around a handful of battleground states.

The approaching Hurricane Sandy forced both campaigns to adjust travel schedules and cancel events. Even at this late date in the campaign, neither side wanted to risk the appearance of putting politics ahead of public safety.

Obama pressed on with a campaign trip Saturday to New Hampshire but held a conference call with administration officials about emergency preparations from aboard Air Force One.

Campaign spokesman Jennifer Psaki said the Obama team is continuing to promote early voting as something that provides flexibility for busy families but she added that "safety comes first and that's the case with early voting as well."

An email announcing that Vice President Joe Biden's Saturday rally in coastal Virginia Beach, Virginia, had been cancelled stated that the change was "being taken out of an abundance of caution to ensure that all local law enforcement and emergency management resources can stay focused on ensuring the safety of people who might be impacted by the storm."

Romney has officially canceled all three Sunday events planned for Virginia because of weather concerns. Campaign spokesman Rick Gorka said it's "a cautionary move to ensure emergency resources personnel would not be diverted."

Instead of campaigning in Virginia, Romney will head back to Ohio, where his running mate Paul Ryan is in the midst of a bus tour. Romney

plans to join Ryan for three Sunday events in Ohio.

None of Obama's campaign stops had been canceled, but he did adjust his travel schedule slightly. The campaign moved up his planned Monday departure for Florida to Sunday night to beat the storm.

One prominent Romney supporter, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, said Saturday he told the campaign he couldn't travel on Tuesday because he wanted to keep tabs on the storm.

With the Nov. 6 election fast approaching, Obama and Romney are tied nationally. But the president still appears to have more ways to reach the required 270 electoral votes.

Presidents are not elected by national popular vote, but in state-by-state contests that allocate electoral votes. Each state gets one electoral vote for each of its representatives in the House and Senate. And the U.S. capital, Washington, D.C., gets three votes. The winner needs a majority of the 538 electoral votes.

The Obama campaign released a new TV ad Saturday urging Americans when they go into the voting booth to consider Romney's plans to roll back Wall Street reforms, transform the Medicare health care program for the elderly into a voucher-like system and reduce spending on education while at the same time cutting taxes for the rich. The spot will air in Florida, Iowa, Ohio and Virginia, all key battleground states.

Republican presidential candidate, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney speaks during a campaign rally at the Pensacola Bay Center in Pensacola Fla., Saturday, Oct. 27, 2012. (AP Photo/Michael Spooneybarger)

The Republican nominee is trying to seize the momentum mantle and turn a wave of Republican enthusiasm into an electoral victory.

Romney traveled to Florida, the pivotal state that gave the 2000 race to Republican George W. Bush, where early voting began Saturday.

Romney told a packed crowd at the Pensacola Civic Center that Obama was "shrinking from the magnitude of the times" and advancing an agenda about "small things" that lacked vision.

Noting that Obama supporters like to chant "four more years" at the president's campaign rallies, Romney picked up on his crowd's own chant and said, "I like '10 more days' a lot better."

"We are gonna win this," Romney told the cheering crowd. "You know that, we're gonna win, yeah?"

Obama accused Romney of running for governor in Massachusetts on a pledge to lower taxes, then making life more expensive for the middle class after taking office.

"All he's offering is a big rerun of the same policies," Obama told a crowd of 8,500 gathered at an outdoor rally in Nashua, New Hampshire, on an unseasonably warm October day.

The president said Romney even raised fees in Massachusetts on obtaining a birth certificate, "which would have been expensive for me." It was a veiled reference to opponents of the president who have incorrectly said he was born outside the United States. Copies of his birth certificate have been in high demand.

Romney's running mate, U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan, was out early in rainy, chilly Ohio to start a two-day, 400-mile (640-kilometer) bus tour of Ohio's small towns and cities. Ryan planned to be in the state until Monday, trying to connect with the working class voters the Republican ticket needs if it is to deny Obama a second term.

Ryan said Obama has not made the case that Obama deserves another four years in office.

"He can't run on his record. The Obama economic agenda failed not because it was stopped; it failed because it was passed," Ryan told 1,000 supporters at a factory in New Philadelphia in eastern Ohio.

Obama's campaign pressed forward with a get-out-the-vote effort that aides said had them leading or tied in every competitive state. The president was eschewing the lofty rhetoric of his 2008 run in favor of

warning supporters that skipping out on voting could cost him the election.

"In 2000, Gore vs. Bush, 537 votes changed the direction of history in a profound way and the same thing could happen," Obama said in an interview Friday with MTV where he appealed for support from young voters..

Romney was switching his attention to Florida on Saturday after spending much of the week focused on shoring up support in Ohio. While the Midwestern swing state could be crucial to Romney's re-election prospects, he also faces tremendous pressure to carry Florida, which offers 29 Electoral College votes, the most of any swing state.

Obama carried Florida by just 3 percentage points in 2008 and polls show the candidates tied.

The former Massachusetts governor was scheduled to attend three rallies, the first in Pensacola along the state's conservative Panhandle. He then moves to suburban Orlando before finishing his day with an evening rally just outside of Tampa, the site of the Republican National Convention. Romney was to be joined at all three events by Florida Sen. Marco Rubio.

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Associated Press writers Julie Pace in Nashua, New Hampshire, Nancy Benac in Washington, Philip Elliott in Ohio, and Steve Peoples in Pensacola, Florida, contributed to this report.

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