

September 7, 2012 Friday

**Obama asks for patience in difficult times**

By Dave McKinney and Natasha Korecki

Staff reporters

CHARLOTTE, N.C. - His hold on the White House in doubt, President Barack Obama Thursday pleaded for patience in fixing the economy, reminded voters that Osama bin Laden was killed on his orders and belittled his GOP rivals for embodying an "era of blundering and blustering."

"I won't pretend the path I'm offering is quick or easy. I never have. You didn't elect me to tell you what you wanted to hear. You elected me to tell you the truth," Obama said in a speech that closed out the final night of a star-studded, emotional Democratic National Convention.

"And the truth is, it will take more than a few years for us to solve challenges that have built up over decades. It will require common effort, shared responsibility, and the kind of bold, persistent experimentation that Franklin Roosevelt pursued during the only crisis worse than this one."

Gone from Obama's acceptance repertoire were the grandiosity and the garish Greek columns that were flourishes when he was nominated president by Democrats in 2008, filling a Denver stadium with 80,000 supporters on a promise of hope and change.

In their place Thursday came acknowledgments that the economy has stubbornly spun in place despite the president's best efforts.

Republican Mitt Romney has targeted Obama's hope-and-change theme from four years ago as empty rhetoric, with continuing job losses and stagnant wages serving as proof that living standards in America haven't improved in any way after four years of an Obama White House.

But in the first of many swipes at Romney and running mate Paul Ryan, the president attacked his "friends at the Republican convention" who focused on the ills of America without offering any workable, clear or even coherent solutions.

"Feel a cold coming on? Take two tax cuts, roll back some regulations, and call us in the morning!" Obama said, drawing one of the night's biggest laughs in the convention hall.

Building on that, the president and surrogates, including Vice President Joe Biden, Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and former Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm, underscored the president's successes, insisting his policies have spared the nation from a far worse fate than the persistent high unemployment and sluggish job growth that has plagued the economy.

"America has turned the corner!" Biden yelled, drawing a roar.

Of his running mate, Biden said, "This man has courage in his soul, compassion in his heart and steel in his spine."

Speaker after speaker pointed to Obama saving the auto industry from financial ruin, delivering on his promise of affordable health care and preventing a collapse of the banking industry.

Obama also portrayed himself as a president who kept his promises in delivering a series of foreign-policy successes, including withdrawing troops from Iraq, driving out Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi and giving Navy SEALs the go-ahead to gun down Osama bin Laden.

"In a world of new threats and new challenges, you can choose leadership that has been tested and proven. Four years ago, I promised to end the war in Iraq. We did," he said, interrupted by cheering.

"I promised to refocus on the terrorists who actually attacked us on 9/11. We have. We've blunted the Taliban's momentum in Afghanistan, and in 2014, our longest war will be over. A new tower rises above the New York skyline, al-Qaida is on the path to defeat, and Osama bin Laden is dead," the president said.

But maybe the best line of the entire night came from Kerry, who used bin Laden's death to throw Romney's argument that life has soured since Obama's election back in the GOP candidate's face.

"Ask Osama bin Laden if he's better off now than he was four years ago," Kerry said.

Sitting in the front row near Obama was the Illinois delegation, including Secretary of State Jesse White, Gov. Pat Quinn, and Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan. They repeatedly leapt to their feet as Obama laid out his accomplishments, with the governor repeatedly jumping up and waving a sign that read "Forward."

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) held her phone to record the Obama family walking across the stage under red, white and blue confetti.

On domestic issues, Obama promised to increase tax rates on those earning more than $250,000, create 1 million manufacturing jobs by 2016, cut oil imports in half by 2020 and, in a clear swipe at the GOP ticket, never "turn Medicare into a voucher."

"I refuse to ask middle-class families to give up their deductions for owning a home or raising their kids just to pay for another millionaire's tax cut," Obama said, bringing the crowd to its feet.

One of the night s most dramatic moments came before Obama took the stage when former U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords (D-Ariz.), the victim of a paralyzing assassination attempt, hobbled onto the stage with help from her friend, U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.), and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

When Giffords was finished, she lifted her left arm, blew kisses into the air and drew a gigantic roar.

Another high point came when the last surviving child of one Democratic presidential family strode onto the convention hall stage and compared Obama to her father, slain President John F. Kennedy.

"Barack Obama is the kind of leader my father wrote about in Profiles in Courage," said Caroline Kennedy, who endorsed Obama in 2008. "He doesn't do what's easy. He does what's hard. He does what's right."

Obama ended his speech where he started - acknowledging the economic suffering Americans face, insisting he would lead the country on a long, but collective, march back to prosperity and coming back to that theme that propelled him to the White House in 2008: hope.

"I know what it means to send young Americans into battle, for I have held in my arms the mothers and fathers of those who didn't return. I've shared the pain of families who've lost their homes, and the frustration of workers who've lost their jobs.

"But as I stand here tonight, I have never been more hopeful about America. Not because I think I have all the answers. Not because I'm naive about the magnitude of our challenges," he said. "I'm hopeful because of you."