There's No Doubt: We're In for a Rough Campaign

By Ronald Brownstein

With the battle for the White House officially joined, President Bush and Democratic Bill Clinton have quickly erased any doubts about its nature. This campaign is going to be fast, relentless and mean.

Already, the attacks, counterattacks and ad wars have reached a frenzied intensity and typically seen until October. And in these rancorous engagements, the two sides have expressed an aggressive philosophy — both intend to constantly move the debate back onto one or two central arguments and quickly neutralize issues that threaten to distract from these core concerns.

Bush and Clinton "are each clearly trying to avoid letting the other frame the debate on terms unfavorable to themselves," says Thomas E. Mann, director of the governmental studies program at the Brookings Institution.

As part of that strategy, both men are moving to maximize their differences on issues where they perceive an advantage — and minimize them on questions where they feel vulnerable. Clinton, for instance, has refused to debate Bush on the issue of fuel efficiency standards for automobiles — a potential area for a political land mine.

"In Bush's case the linchpin argument is that Bush is portraying the Arkansas governor as a tax-and-spend liberal who would make the economy worse by expanding government and is hiding his intention to do so as part of a broader pattern of misleading voters about his political agenda and personal life. For Clinton, the centerpiece arguments are the economy and trust as well. Clinton maintains that Bush, trapped in the grip of an outdated economic theory, has failed to produce a plan to revive the economy and, now, in a desperate attempt to save his job is unlatching both wild accusations and implausible promises he has no intention of keeping."

The efforts by both sides to frame the debate through competing stories is perhaps most visible in their skirmishing over the past week on the economy and the federal budget.

"In Bush's case the acceptance speech last Thursday, Bush moved to reattach himself to the conservative economic agenda of restraining the scope and size of government. That was his own_SHIFT_ moment in this campaign. Bush has been off under fire from conservative American workers. At the same time, both campaigns are trying to frame the sharpest possible terms two contrasting economic philosophies.

"I've been here for 35 years, and I've never seen anything like this," says Morgan City Police Chief Daniel Dosssett. "I was here for Hurricane Betsy (in 1965), and it was impressive, but I don't remember being quite so impressed with it as this one. It was more frightening for me because all we could do was sit here and watch it move right down the street."

Dosssett said National Guard troops were headed toward Morgan City tonight to help the police guard against looting. There had been reports of looting anywhere in the area.

Authorities gave conflicting reports on the extent of damage to the city and nearby areas that, as of early Wednesday night, had not yet been surveyed by insurance underwriting officials. Some unofficial reports said that, while wind and rain damage was extensive, there were few injuries reported. In the aftermath of the disaster relief for Terrebonne Parish, said hundreds of families were stranded or homeless in bayou lands south of the Intracoastal Waterway.

The two reported deaths in the state were indirectly caused by the hurricane, authorities said. One man died of a heart attack while driving his car Tuesday night. Another man died in a vehicle in the Terrebonne Parish, while another was found dead in the cabin of his home after a tornado whipped through La Place in the Mississippi River near New Orleans and Banne Rouge.

La Place was one of the most heavily damaged areas in Louisiana. One tornado touched down some seven miles west of that town Monday night, leaving at least 33 residents, including a girl, 2, reported in serious condition, and leveling dozens of homes and trailers. At least one and perhaps two other tornadoes struck the area this morning, officials said.

Andrew Appears Partly to Spare Gulf Coast, Louisiana

Andrew, from Page 2

went to Lafayette. Along with hundreds of towns and businesses were washed away by high winds and falling trees, miles of embankments which once were a nesting harbor was wiped out. The same winds were the same winds that moved the same winds last night and this morning.

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