



Vice President Joe Biden and President Barack Obama embrace Chris Coons at a fundraiser for the Senate hopeful Friday at The Grand. Obama said Delawareans have the chance to impact not only the state but also the country. (The News Journal/ROBERT CRAIG)

WILMINGTON -- President Barack Obama came to The Grand in Wilmington on Friday to ask voters to remain faithful to the Democratic Party to prevent a conservative takeover of Congress.

"In a little more than two weeks, you have the opportunity right here in Delaware to set the direction of this state and this country for the next several years."

Obama, along with Vice President Joe Biden, spoke to Democratic supporters at a fundraiser for U.S. Senate candidate Chris Coons. Coons is facing tea party favorite Republican Christine O'Donnell.

Obama issued a warning to Democrats: If Republicans are victorious in taking over Congress, they'll try to implement "an agenda that nearly destroyed our economy." The president asked voters to give him a chance to complete implementation of the economic and social programs his administration began in 2008.

"We still have a long way to go. We still have a lot of work to do. Families are hanging on by a thread. That's what is keeping me up at night. That's what keeps me fighting. The biggest mistake we could make right now would be to go back to the policies that didn't work in the first place."

Since O'Donnell's victory over Republican Party favorite Mike Castle last month, Delaware's Senate race has gone from a near-certain loss for Democrats to what several recent polls indicate is a likely win. Viewed as a sacrificial lamb against Castle, Coons is now seen as the front-runner.

Speaking to supporters who had paid \$100 to \$1,000 a ticket, Obama urged them to keep working hard in the remaining 18 days before the Nov. 2 election. The event also included Gov. Jack Markell, Sen. Tom Carper, Sen. Ted Kaufman, Lt. Gov. Matt Denn and former Lt. Gov. and House candidate John Carney.

Coons' campaign would not say how much money was raised.

Obama has launched a series of campaign speeches going into the midterm elections, including stops in Boston, Portland, Ore., Los Angeles and Minnesota.

With an anticipated wave of Republican victories spurred by the strength of tea party candidates, Obama has campaigned to get out the vote.

"Although I think Chris has so far run an extraordinary race, I don't want anyone here taking that for granted," Obama said.

Franklin & Marshall government professor Stephen Medvic said a presidential appearance is likely to have little sway on voters' decisions in either direction.

"I really don't think anybody is going to hold it against Coons because the president shows up," Medvic said. "If they're unwilling to vote for Coons because they're unhappy with the way the administration has handled things, then they've already made up their minds."

The biggest advantage of the appearance, Medvic said, is the ability to get the Democratic base excited.

Obama filled that role, telling attendees at the event to make phone calls, talk to their friends and volunteer on the campaign.

Coons has held a comfortable lead in the race since after the primary, beating O'Donnell in independent polls by double digits. O'Donnell supporters said Obama's appearance is a sign that Coons is in trouble.

"To me, it shows that they're scared to death that Christine is going to win," said Alex Garcia, 49, of Magnolia, co-founder of the 9-12 Delaware Patriots, who chartered a bus to bring 30 members from Milford and Dover to the event to hold signs for O'Donnell.

O'Donnell's campaign used the event to portray Coons as an elitist tied to the Obama administration.

"Chris Coons has 'superglued' himself to the Obama agenda of job-killing, big government policies," O'Donnell said in a news release. "His \$1,000-per-plate fundraiser today with President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden demonstrates an incredible lack of empathy and a strong disconnect with Delaware."

O'Donnell may have her own high-profile supporter come to Delaware. Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin said in a Fox News appearance two weeks ago that she was going to visit the state to campaign for O'Donnell.

"Everybody knows there is some kind of connection between the two," Medvic said. "O'Donnell is in a way a protégé."

Medvic said an appearance by Palin, who has been touring national talk shows to appeal for donations, could raise money for O'Donnell.

Biden introduced Obama, speaking first to a crowd that knows him well. It was the third time Biden has come to Delaware to campaign for Coons.

"When Chris Coons goes to the United States Senate, you will never have to wonder why you voted for him," Biden told the crowd.

Obama's speech touched on several of his economic recovery talking points.

"They want to roll back Wall Street reform so that taxpayers are on the hook again," Obama said. "They want to cut back on education spending by 20 percent to help pay for a \$700 billion tax break that only the wealthiest Americans will benefit from."

Obama repeated his analogy that the economy is like a car that Republicans drove into a ditch. Democrats have been pushing the car out, he said, and now Republicans want the keys. A driver puts the car in "D" to go forward and "R" to go backward, he said.

"Don't let them take this country backwards," he said.

Obama repeated his allegation that foreign money is being spent for Republicans in this year's elections. Obama has questioned whether the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is accepting political donations from foreign companies. The chamber, a business lobbying group, has no limit on its expenditures and is not required to disclose donors.

"This isn't just a threat to the Democrats, it's a threat to our democracy," Obama said. "The only way to match their millions of dollars is with millions of voices."

The Citizens United decision by the U.S. Supreme Court has legitimized undisclosed spending by corporations for political campaigns. Obama has argued that the decision favors the Republicans and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which backs mostly Republican candidates.

Obama also said negative campaigning is turning off voters.

"It doesn't help when you turn on the television and see politicians tearing each other down or pundits who treat politics like a sport," Obama said.

Neither Biden nor Obama mentioned O'Donnell in their remarks.

The only speaker, other than Coons, who made reference to O'Donnell was Sen. Ted Kaufman, who has held the seat for the past two years. Kaufman referred to "Coons the witch slayer" in his introduction.

O'Donnell said in 1997 on national television that she had "dabbled into witchcraft."

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