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‘Electing the President 2012’ offers behind-the-scenes look at campaign

Republican and Democratic campaign staffs question each other on strategy and tactics

PHILADELPHIA – Heading into the 2012 election season, Barack Obama’s November victory, in which he captured 51.1 percent of the popular vote, was by no means a foregone conclusion. No incumbent since FDR, in 1936, had kept the Oval Office while having an unemployment rate as high as the one that dogged the first Obama administration. But with housing starts and the stock market up and unemployment down, Obama became the second Democrat since FDR to claim a second term.

How he got there and how key campaign decisions were made by Obama’s staff and that of his rival, Republican Mitt Romney, was the focus of a closed-door debriefing at the Annenberg Public Policy Center, at the University of Pennsylvania, on Dec. 6, 2012, just 30 days after the election.

“Electing the President 2012,” published by the University of Pennsylvania Press (280 pages, \$24.95), shares insider analysis and insights from that daylong meeting involving top campaign strategists who spoke freely and asked each other about their perspectives and decisions. Among them were members of President Obama’s campaign (David Axelrod, Joel Benenson, Stephanie Cutter, Anita Dunn, and Jim Margolis) and Romney’s campaign (Eric Fehrstrom, Kevin Madden, Beth Myers, Neil Newhouse, and Stuart Stevens).

On the Obama campaign and the monthly jobs numbers:

Eric Fehrstrom, strategic adviser to the Romney campaign: “I’m just curious what it was like at the Obama campaign in Chicago –”

Stephanie Cutter, Obama deputy campaign manager: “Oh my God.”

Fehrstrom: “...the first Friday of every month. Did you have some kind of heads up about what was coming and what kind of a pins and needles experience that was for you?”

Cutter: “Well, we didn’t have a heads up on the numbers. Legally, we couldn’t. But, of course, we had a lot of economic experts giving us their forecasts... Well, we did a lot of downplaying of the number. We were fortunate not by pure luck, but blood, sweat and tears, that that number was on a steady trajectory... So we lived by the first Friday of each month.”

On the Romney campaign’s decision not to release multiple years of tax returns:

Joel Benenson, pollster and senior strategist for President Obama: “Everybody knew you had given 23 years of tax returns to [presidential candidate Sen. John] McCain [in ‘08]... So you had them. The governor even said, ‘I’m a pack rat. I had them all.’”

Eric Fehrstrom: “We talked about what our theory in the race was, which is it was going to come down to the economy. And it did come down to the economy. As I said, things improved enough that you guys were able to make a case to stay the course. A corollary to that is that we weren’t going to be distracted by shiny objects. And the shiniest of all the objects was the governor’s tax returns. So we put out a level of information that we thought could withstand press scrutiny and also satisfy a legitimate public interest to know how much money the governor made.”

“Electing the President 2012” is the fourth debriefing book released by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, which has conducted campaign debriefings since 1992. The book includes a DVD of the sessions. It is edited by **Kathleen Hall Jamieson**, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center and Elizabeth Ware Packard Professor of Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. She is author or co-author of 16 books, including “The Obama Victory: How Media, Money, and Message Shaped the 2008 Election,” “Presidents Creating the Presidency,” and “Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment.”

For information on ordering “Electing the President 2012” see the University of Pennsylvania Press website: <http://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/15182.html>.

The **Annenberg Public Policy Center** (<http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org>) was established in 1994 to educate the public and policy makers about the media’s role in advancing public understanding of political and health issues at the local, state and federal levels.

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