

Obama has work to do in Florida

By [Adam C. Smith](#), Times Political Editor

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Don't get cocky about Florida, **Barack Obama**. Sure, it looks neck and neck in this must-win state for **John McCain**, and, yes, you're setting up the biggest ground organization this state has ever seen from a Democrat (look for a Tampa field office opening this week). But ominous signs abound.

Obama has spent more than \$5-million on TV ads in Florida since June, and McCain not a penny, according to an analysis by a Wisconsin Advertising Project. Yet the latest Quinnipiac University poll showed Obama virtually tied with McCain — 46 percent to 44 percent — and independent Florida voters swinging from a 10-point lead for Obama in June to a 4-point lead to McCain.

Quinnipiac found McCain leading in every region except South Florida. In all-important Tampa Bay, it was McCain 47 percent and Obama 43 percent. Meanwhile, a July 20-28 poll by **Fabrizio McLaughlin** and Associates for the Florida Chamber of Commerce showed McCain leading in Florida 45 percent to 40 percent. **Obama's interview**

Check out the exclusive Obama interview with *Political Connections* on Bay News 9 today at 11 a.m. and 8 p.m. The presumptive Democratic nominee weighs in on his shifting position on offshore drilling, his spending plans, that pesky Muslim myth, and why he won't accept McCain's challenge/offer to a bunch of *mano-a-mano* debates.

Obama said he's too busy running a 50-state campaign: "We've got to make sure we do these town hall meetings where we're interacting with voters. We've got a lot of ground to cover. ... We'll have three debates. I think people are going to see a very sharp contrast."

Crist bulletproof

Did **Charlie Crist** damage himself with \$1,800-a-night hotel stays in Europe while the Florida economy continued to tank? Not according to that latest Florida chamber poll that showed 63 percent of Florida voters approve of his job performance.

GOP surging here

Republican National Committee chairman **Mike Duncan** is scheduled to hit Tampa Tuesday to rev up the GOP troops in the biggest battleground region of America's biggest battleground state.

Fading VP hopes?

It seems likely that Crist has indeed sent voluminous files of info to McCain's vice presidential vetters, but the Crist Veep-O-Meter is pessimistic this week because we've found little evidence of a microscopic examination of Crist's background or much buzz about him being high on the list.

What's more, Crist's appearance on MSNBC last week raised doubts about his attack-dog skills, when three different times Crist declined to tell **Joe Scarborough** he agreed with McCain's assertion that Obama was willing to lose in Iraq in order to win the election.

Christian pep rally

Mike Huckabee headlines the Christian Coalition's God and Country Gala on Aug. 16 in Orlando, in what's billed as an effort to wake up social conservatives in Florida. "His primary message will be to protect the definition of marriage. This is no time to sit home when the very foundation of civilization is being challenged," said former Republican state Rep. **Dennis Baxley** of Ocala, executive director of the Christian Coalition of Florida.

Dine and deliver

Crist is scheduled to help North Carolina Sen. **Elizabeth Dole** raise money at a \$1,000-per-person reception at the Tampa home of **Al and Beverly Austin** Aug. 25.

Winner of the week

Good news for state Rep. **Rick Kriseman**, D-St. Petersburg, whose family hasn't had much lately. They lost their house and dogs, Henry and Maggie, in a fire recently. But Kriseman tells Buzz they just adopted another black Lab from Lab rescue, Peppermint, Buzz's winner of the week.

Loser of the week

U.S. Rep. **Robert Wexler**, is so safe in his hard-core Democratic South Florida district it would take a serious scandal to make him vulnerable. Still, Barack Obama's Florida co-chairman last week announced he would rent a home in the Palm Beach County district, after Fox News reported that he was listing his in-laws' place in a seniors-only community as his Florida residence, while he and his wife and three kids were really Maryland residents.

"Although I am confident that I have represented my district as well as anybody possibly could, I have heard the concerns of some of my constituents and do not want this issue to distract from my advocacy of the important issues facing our community and country," Wexler said in a written statement.