



WHY IT MATTERS: Issues at stake in election

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Part of a series examining issues at stake in the election and their impact on people

A selection of issues at stake in the presidential election and their impact on Americans.

Afghanistan:

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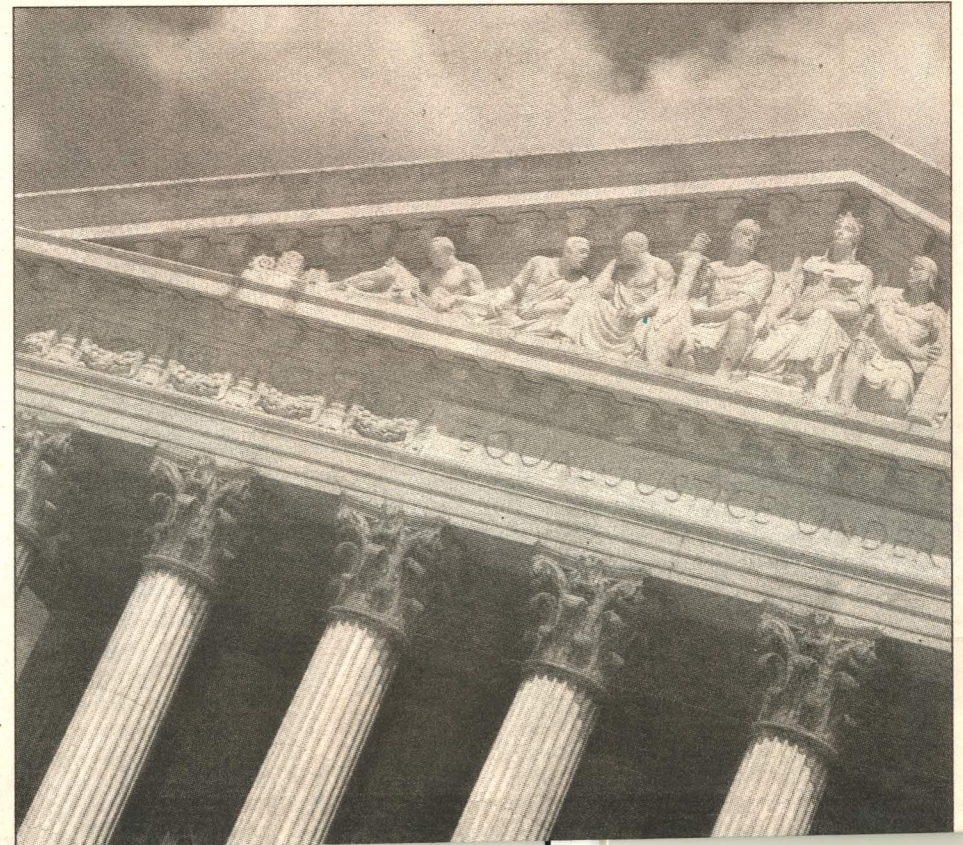
Tensions now have spread to the automotive sector: The U.S. is seeking international rulings against Chinese subsidies for its auto and auto-parts exports and against Chinese duties on U.S. autos. Romney says he'll get tougher on China's trade violations. Obama has taken a variety of trade actions against China, but on the currency issue, he has opted to wait for economic forces to encourage Beijing to raise values.

Cheap Chinese goods have benefited American consumers and restrained inflation. But those imports have hurt American manufacturers. And many U.S. companies outsource production to China. One study estimated that between 2001 and 2010, 2.8 million U.S. jobs were lost or displaced to China.

Climate change:

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The official answer is by the end of 2014, when the U.S. and its allies plan to end their combat role. The Afghans will be fully in charge, or so it is hoped, and the war will be over, at least for Americans.

Campaign finance:

This election probably will cost more than \$1 billion. Big donors who help cover the tab could gain outsized influence with the election's winner. Your voice may not be heard as loudly as a result.

Recent court decisions have stripped away restrictions on how elections are financed, allowing the very rich to afford more speech than the rest. In turn, super PACs have flourished, thanks as well to limitless contributions from the wealthy - including contributors who have business before the government.

Disclosure rules offer a glimpse into who's behind the money. But the information is often too vague to be useful. And non-profits that run so-called issue ads don't have to reveal donors.

Obama criticized the Supreme Court for removing campaign finance restrictions. Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney supported the ruling. Both are using the lax rules with gusto.

China:

The U.S. accuses China of flouting trade rules and undervaluing its currency to help its exporters, hurting American competitors and jobs. But imposing tariffs could set off a trade war and drive up prices for

panels. Another panel study estimated that from 2001 and 2010, 2.8 million U.S. jobs were lost or displaced to China.

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In the U.S. July was the hottest month ever recorded and this year is on track to be the warmest. Scientists say that's both from natural drought and man-made global warming. Each decade since the 1970s has been nearly one-third of a degree warmer than the previous one.

Sea levels are rising while glaciers and summer Arctic sea ice are shrinking. Plants are blooming earlier. Some species could die because of global warming.

Obama proposed a bill to cap power plant carbon dioxide emissions, but it died in Congress. Still, he's doubling auto mileage standards and put billions into cleaner energy. Romney now questions the science of man-made global warming and says some actions to curb emissions could hurt an already struggling economy.

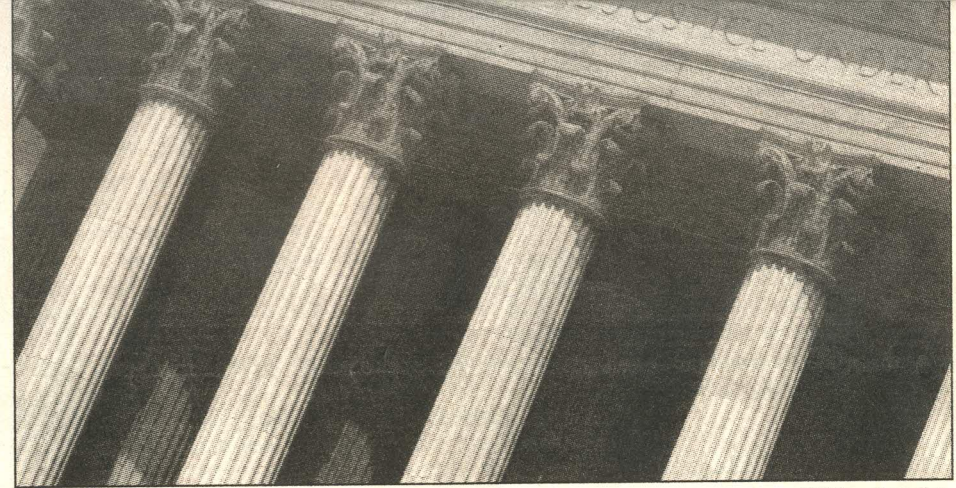
Debt:

A sea of red ink is confronting the nation and presidents to come.

The budget deficit - the shortfall created when the government spends more in a given year than it collects - is on track to top \$1 trillion for the fourth straight year. The government borrows about 40 cents for every dollar it spends.

The national debt is the total amount the federal government owes. It's risen to a shade over \$16 trillion.

Obama has proposed bringing deficits down by slowing spending gradually, to avoid suddenly tipping the economy back into recession. He'd raise taxes on households earning more than \$250,000 and impose a surcharge of 30 percent on those making more than \$1 million. Romney would lower deficits mostly through deep spending cuts. But many of the cuts he's pushing would be partially negated by his proposals to lower top tax rates on cor-



AP/Alex Brandon

This June 20, file photo shows a view of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington. With four justices in their seventies, odds are good that whoever is elected in November will have a chance to fill at least one Supreme Court seat. The next justice could dramatically alter the direction of a court closely divided between conservatives and liberals. One new face on the bench could mean a sea change in how millions get health care, shape the rights of gay Americans and much more.

porations and individuals.

Economy:

The job market is brutal and the economy weak. Nearly 13 million Americans can't find work; the unemployment rate has been higher than 8 percent for more than 40 months. A divided Washington has done little to ease the misery.

The economy didn't take off when the recession ended in June 2009. Growth has never been slower in the three years after a downturn. The human toll is staggering. Forty percent of the jobless, 5 million people, have been out of work six months or more - a "national crisis," according to Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke. Wages aren't keeping up with inflation.

Obama wants to create jobs by keeping taxes low for everybody but the wealthiest and with public-works spending, clean energy projects and targeted tax breaks to businesses. Romney proposes further cuts in tax rates for all income levels; he'd also slash corporate rates, reduce regulations and encourage oil production.

Education:

Education ranks second only to the economy in issues important to Americans. Yet the U.S. lags globally in educating its children. And higher education costs are leaving students saddled with debt or unable to afford college at all.

State budget cuts have meant teacher layoffs and larger class sizes. Colleges have had to make do with less. It all trickles down to the kids in the classroom.

Although Washington contributes a small fraction of education money, it influences teacher quality, accessibility and more. For example, to be freed from provisions of the No Child Left Behind law, states had to develop federally approved reforms.

Romney wants more state and local control over education. But he supports some of Obama's proposals, notably charter schools and teacher evaluations. So, look for them to be there whoever wins the White House.