Anti-Obama 'The One' ad goes funny, not negative, McCain says

Obama, meanwhile, unveils an emergency stimulus plan.

By Nicholas Riccardi and Stephen Braun, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers
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PANAMA CITY BEACH, FLA. -- At the end of an increasingly contentious week of campaigning, Sen. John McCain denied Friday that he was going negative against Sen. Barack Obama, even as his camp released a new Web ad that mockingly contrasts Obama's soaring rhetoric with clips of Charlton Heston playing Moses in "The Ten Commandments."

Earlier this week, McCain's campaign unveiled an ad that compared the Illinois senator to Britney Spears and Paris Hilton. On Thursday, McCain and his campaign manager accused Obama of playing "the race card" when he warned voters against attacks that he looks different from the presidents on U.S. currency.

"I don't think it's negative," McCain said at a news conference here. "I think we're drawing the difference between us."

The Obama campaign fired back quickly. "It's downright sad that on a day when we learned that 51,000 Americans lost their jobs, a candidate for the presidency is spending all of his time and the powerful platform he has on these sorts of juvenile antics," spokesman Hari Sevugan said. The new McCain spot, titled "The One," opens like a Hollywood movie trailer, with a deep-voiced announcer declaring: "In 2008, the world will be blessed. They will call him: The One." It then cuts to some of Obama's loftier moments -- his declaration that "we are the ones we have been waiting for," and part of his speech upon clinching the Democratic nomination: "This was the moment when the rise of our oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal."

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"They're calling folks names like they used to do in fifth grade. You remember fifth grade? Calling each other names and petty fights. We don't have time for that. That doesn't lower gas prices and secure people's jobs."

Earlier Friday, Obama unveiled a $50-billion emergency economic stimulus plan. At a campaign stop in St. Petersburg, Fla., Obama called for energy rebates of up to $1,000, five years of a windfall profits tax on oil companies, and $25 billion to replenish the highway trust fund.

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Some of the elements of the plan were from Obama's past proposals, but on the day the government announced that the unemployment rate hit 5.7%, a four-year high, the likely Democratic presidential nominee upped the stakes with the energy rebate, more details on the profits tax and the extra funds for highways.

"This [energy] rebate will be enough to offset the increased cost of gas for a working family over the next four months," Obama said at a town-hall-style meeting.

Noting a headline in the morning's St. Petersburg Times that told of the first recessionary downturn in the state since 1991, Obama again linked McCain and President Bush, blaming both men for failing to aid Americans struggling with job losses and home foreclosures.

"My opponent," Obama told the Gibbs High School crowd, "embraced the Bush economic policies and promises to continue them. Well, our country cannot afford to keep doing the same thing over and over again and expect a different result."

Today, Obama will address the Urban League's national convention in Orlando.

McCain spoke to that largely African American group Friday and called for ending affirmative action. "We should provide equal economic opportunities for all Americans, and I think Americans have rejected a quota system," the Arizona senator said.

In contrast to his speech to the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People last month, in which he praised Obama, McCain warned that the presumptive Democratic nominee's "ideas are not always as impressive as his rhetoric."

McCain also vowed to fight for charter schools and local control over education spending, and accused Obama of failing to support the cause. McCain called education reform a civil rights issue.

"What is the value of access to a failing school?" he said.

Some audience members said they respected McCain for attending the event, even if they were angered by his campaign's "race card" charges against Obama.

Virginia Clark, an executive recruiter from Chicago who has donated to Obama's campaign and considers him a friend, said she was disappointed by McCain's statement Thursday. She believed Obama was simply acknowledging the reality of his racial identity.

"It shows a real misunderstanding of the African American community," she said of McCain. "He's bold to even show up here."

At his news conference in Panama City, McCain tried to put the race issue behind him.

Referring to Obama's comments, McCain told reporters that they "were clearly the race card because of what he said. Everybody can read his remarks."

"I was very disappointed at his comments," McCain said. "His campaign retracted those remarks, so let's move on."

It was not clear what retraction McCain was referring to. The Obama camp stood by its candidate's remarks; it did not comment further.

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Times staff writer Michael Muskal contributed from Los Angeles.
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